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SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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“Go for the gold”...is an allusion to the gold medal...the highest prize in major competitive sports...especially in the Olympic games.

The top prize in any sports event...demands rigorous discipline and training on the part of the contestant who hopes to win the prize. Even then, there is no guarantee he will cross the finish line first...or at all.

And just think of all the knowledge needed to get an invitation to be a contestant on the popular game show *Jeopardy*...and a chance to become the all-time champion.

Saint Paul wrote the challenges we face during this lifetime are a lot like running a race...with a major difference...we already have the Grand Prize...everlasting life. The athletes of Paul’s time who came in first place got to keep their prizes...crowns made of laurel leaves...but the crowns didn’t last...they eventually dried up.

The football and baseball players we idolize today earn their rewards...and they deserve everything that comes along with winning the game. Our prize...heaven...cannot be earned...it is a gift from God...but it is a gift that comes with a commitment...the discipline and willingness to do the work God wants us to do!

The Gospel is precisely about doing God’s work. The agricultural imagery of the vineyard owner hiring people at different times of the day to go work in his vineyard, may not resonate well with those of us who have had little or no exposure to farming or gardening. We can all relate to wages earned for the work we do...the paycheck!

Jesus was the master storyteller and he uses parables...short stories based on life experiences people understood...to make a point. The workers in the Gospel didn’t work the same amount of hours...but they all got paid for a full day’s work. Some workers grumbled because they had worked all day. They wanted a bigger paycheck. However, the vineyard owner had a right to be generous...overly generous if he wanted...in paying his workers.

The point of the story is simply this: God’s generosity exceeds anything we can imagine and

surpasses all standards of what we consider equitable payment for the work we do. Our job is to try to figure out what God wants us to do with our lives. We should do our work faithfully and enthusiastically. God’s reward is the same...no matter how early or late in our lives we start our work.

Father Massey Shepherd writes in the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*:

“...the parable teaches us we do not and cannot earn our reward in the Kingdom of God by merely working long and arduously. It is a free gift of Him who alone knows our merits and deserts.”

Toward the end of his life Saint Paul summarized his work in these compelling words,

“I run straight for the finish line. I am like a boxer who doesn’t waste his punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest”.

Paul experienced many hardships during his lifetime but he never waived in doing his work faithfully and energetically. He encourages us to “harden” ourselves in the same way...so we too don’t waiver in the work we do.

Jesus tells us heaven is like a vineyard where all the workers get paid the same wages...wages they can’t earn. Saint Paul tells us life is like running a race...and the prize for those who finish the race is heaven...and there is no first, second or third place in heaven. Heaven is the GRAND PRIZE of all...not more and not less. Heaven is...HEAVEN!

When we see God face to face, and Jesus promises we will some day, just as he sees him now, we want to stand with Saint Paul and say,

“I have done my best in the race. I have run the full distance, and I have kept the Faith. And now there is waiting for me the prize of victory...not only for me, but to all who wait with love for him to appear.”

And God will say,

“Well done! The prize is yours”!

And it will be better than any gold medal!

