

VII TRINITY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ROMANS 6.19 St. MARK 8.1



"Listen up"...says our friend Saint Paul! "I'm talking to you in everyday language you will understand"... "Wages are what we earn"... "God's gift of everlasting life isn't payment for work we do"... "It's free"... "But don't think what we do in this life doesn't matter." "Listen up"!

Wages are what we earn. We get paid by our employer for the work we do. If we do our work well we get invited back to work the next day and earn more wages so we can pay the rent or mortgage, buy food and clothes, pay the insurance, and support the Parish. We have to show up for work, even if we don't feel much like working, if we expect to get a paycheck.

Heaven isn't a paycheck from God for services rendered...it's his free gift to us because he loves us and wants to share eternity with us. While heaven is free...it does come with a condition...we must embrace the freedom to stay away from dark things and instead embrace the freedom of following the Light of Christ.

In many ways Paul's world was like our own. Even he had to work hard to make a living. The Church was attracting new members and growing. Times could be tough and challenging for anyone then just as they can be for us now. Paul tells us to remain strong in our commitment to Jesus and the Church even when times are tough.

Slavery was also a way of life in Paul's time. It's a subject we're uncomfortable talking about...it was only slightly more than 150 years ago since the Emancipation Proclamation freed African Americans in the United States free. We don't like to admit human beings could be cruel enough to treat each other as property. Sadly...human trafficking still exists today.

Saint Paul equates sin with slavery. Jesus sets us free from the consequences of sin...he makes everlasting life in heaven a possibility for everyone who believes in him. The cost to us for being set free is a commitment to always say and do the right things...like people who really are free.

There was a false teaching in the early Church and it continues rearing its ugly head even to this day. Some people tried to say because Jesus has set us free from sin...sin is no longer a matter of consequence...that it really doesn't matter what we do...everyone is going to heaven anyway...so why worry.

Saint Paul counters this dangerous assumption with what he says about slavery. A slave has no control over either his time or activity...he must say and do what his "master" requires. The consequences for misbehavior could be severe...possibly even fatal!

The suggestion it doesn't matter how we conduct ourselves because Jesus has set us free from sin and its consequences...is disordered. Saint Paul is a man who minced no words and he makes it very clear...continued dark behavior is acting like Jesus never really died and set us free at all...we're still slaves to our own bad words and actions...we're still slaves to sin...we're still slaves to ourselves.

When we go to work we're expected to put forth our best efforts for our employer. We're free to do the very best we can...because we know it's the right thing to do...and there is the paycheck we need to make life easier. Poor job performance can result in our dismissal from the job...and no more paycheck...life could get really tough!

Everlasting life is God's free gift to us. It's not something we earned. Jesus paid a heavy price for our freedom from sin, and he did so willingly and without any conditions on his part. We don't have to wait until we get to heaven to enjoy everlasting life. We can begin enjoying it right now, this very moment.

The cost to us for our freedom is to do what is right and good and consistent with Saint Paul's teaching...and to avoid those things that can lead us to dark words and actions. What we do does matter!

"Listen up"...says Paul..."Listen up!"

