

SEPTUAGESIMA 2018
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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1 COR. 9.24 ST. MATT. 20.1

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Go for the Gold...striving to win the top prize...what the athletes competing in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games to be held in South Korea in February hope for...the coveted Gold Medal.

The athletes are the best of the best...they have trained for years. Even though they have disciplined themselves with daily exercise and have eaten healthy foods...there is no guarantee they will get the Gold Medal. They might have to settle for less...or nothing at all.

Saint Paul writes in his Letter to the Corinthians...our Christian lives are like running a race in the Olympics...with a major difference. We already possess the top prize...and it's better than a Gold Medal. Our top prize is everlasting life in heaven...and we didn't win it in any competition...it's God's gift to us...because he loves us.

Athletes in Paul's time got to keep the crown they won. But those crowns were made of laurel leaves. They were beautiful things to look at as long as they lasted...but they eventually dried up and were thrown away...just a memory of what was. Today athletes get to relive their wins through the media of television and the Internet.

If we already possess the prize God wants us to have...everlasting life in heaven...why does Saint Paul tell us to live our lives as if we are still running a race with the Gold Medal within our grasp? We do so precisely because we are grateful to God? We want to live our lives and please God because he gave us his Son, Jesus. Christian life means discipline...to stay focused...on what Saint Paul calls a crown that will last forever.

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". What Paul is saying is our lives in Jesus are lives of prayer, love of God our Father, and compassion for others. When

we show our love for others, we are showing the same kind of love God showed us by giving us his Son, Jesus.

The Pre-Lenten and Lenten Seasons are our ultimate training ground during this life. We have an opportunity to follow Saint Paul's advice, and to ask God for help in our spiritual lives. In addition to Sunday Mass, Saint Joseph Parish will offer a Wednesday Mass during Lent...and a study of the Psalms. We should always set some time aside each day for personal prayer and Bible reading...these are disciplines that help us run the race called life!

God loved the world so much, he gave us Jesus, and Jesus makes heaven and life everlasting available to everyone. The invitation to be with him in heaven does come with an RSVP. We do have to answer "yes" to his invitation, and the work we do here on earth and the love we show toward others is part of how we show God we are serious about his invitation to be with him in heaven. The Gospel makes it clear anyone can answer "yes" and at any time. The Grand Prize is the same for everyone who says "yes" and commits to a life a perfect service to others. We can't have more or less of heaven.

We already have the prize and it's the best prize of all...everlasting life...better than any Gold Medal. That's a good reason to run the race ahead of us. When we see God our Father 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".

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