

VII TRINITY 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

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What is Grace? It's a question often asked and often over-explained. Like the Holy Trinity...if we spend too much time analyzing the Trinity...it stops being the Trinity. If we spend too much time analyzing grace...it stops being grace. Grace is the free and undeserved help God gives us to respond to his call to be his children and inherit everlasting life.

Grace is the gift of God's love and mercy...which he wants us to have...and not because we have done anything to earn it. As Catholic Christians our most tangible experience of God's grace is through Word and Sacrament. What matters in God's eyes is how we use his free gift of grace...and how we use it can be costly.

Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been the subject of several sermons and discussion groups. His book *The Cost of Discipleship* was published in 1937 during the rise of Nazism. He was a vocal opponent of Nazi dictatorship and of the persecution of Jews. Pastor Bonhoeffer was executed by the Gestapo in April 1945. One month later Germany surrendered.

Pastor Bonhoeffer makes a sharp distinction between "cheap" and "costly" grace. It is the same distinction Saint Paul makes in this morning's Epistle. The way we use God's free gift of grace determines whether it is "cheap" or "costly"...whether our faith is passive or active. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the cost of being one of God's children, the cost of being a witness for Jesus, was expensive.

Pastor Bonhoeffer writes passionately about cheap grace...let's again hear what he says:

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."

This cheapens God's free gift of grace and turns the Gospel into a lie that says:

"Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness."

This way of thinking cheapens the Good News into "no news at all". We claim to be God's children and disciples (followers) of Jesus. That means letting God's free gift of grace go to work changing our lives and those around us for the better.

Let's listen again to what Pastor Bonhoeffer writes about costly grace:

"Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and a contrite heart. It is costly because it compels us to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

In this morning's Epistle Saint Paul invites us to experience God's free gift of grace with the understanding we are put right with him by our faith (our trust) in Jesus' "costly" death on the cross. The "costly" part of this grace for us is what we do with it...we must put it into action.

Let's consider what Paul says about wages. Wages are what we earn for the work we do...the paycheck we get for our hard work is not a free gift...it is earned. God's free gift of grace is not a paycheck for a job well done. But it is his stamp of approval we have been put into a right relationship with him through Jesus.

Discipleship means following Jesus not just in our words but in our actions, in how we live, by turning away from the bad behaviors that separate us from God and from each other, by showing that we take God's forgiveness and his grace seriously. It means in the words of the Prayer of Humble Access...not trusting in ourselves to set things right with God, but in his many and great mercies.

"Cheap" grace or "costly" grace. There really is only one choice for us...the "costly" choice to follow Jesus. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all...now and always.

