

SEPTUAGESIMA 2019
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
1 COR. 9.24 ST. MATT. 20.1



Anyone who watches major league sports on TV knows the professional athletes work hard to get where they are. To be good at what they do...they have to practice. Each member of the team has a job to do...to get the team to function like a well-oiled machine. Even with all the practice...there is no guarantee the team will win the game. They might come in second or third place.

The same holds true for those of us who work for a living. If we want to be good at our jobs...we go to school...we study hard...we take tests...and hopefully pass those tests. We try to do our jobs well...if we get sloppy at what we do...we risk losing our jobs and maybe create hardships for others.

Sporting events were as important to the people of Saint Paul's time as they are to people now. We get a tantalizing glimpse into the life of Saint Paul in the athletic metaphors he uses to describe the challenges of the Christian Life. Key words: team work, discipline, persistence and self-sacrifice.

Saint Paul says the Christian Life is like running a race...the major difference is we already have the grand prize...life everlasting...and it's not something we won...it's God's gift to us because he wants us to have it...and it will not fade away.

The athletes of Paul's time received a prize of laurel leaves...beautiful things to look at while they lasted. But they eventually dried up and were thrown away. Our crown of eternal life will last forever.

Toward the end of his life Saint Paul summarized his work in these 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".

Like all good gifts and perfect presents that come from God...the possibility of everlasting life with him comes with a set of instructions...we must continue to run the race called life by staying the course and not

giving up...that requires discipline...and we must reach out to others to have them join us...as Saint Paul tells us...in the race to the finish line.

With the finish line in sight...we're not going to want to do anything that might get us disqualified...especially when we've asked others to join us in the race. We keep practicing the faith...we discipline ourselves through prayer and fasting...we study Holy Scripture every day...and we receive the Blessed Sacrament. These are the tools God gives us to meet meet the challenges life sends our way with unwavering hope.

English Roman Catholic priest Monsignor Ronald Knox (1888-1957) once wrote that, "Septuagesima has an epistle which warns us that it is never too late to be damned, a gospel which tells us it is never too late to be saved." The Gospel makes it clear anyone can join the race to the finish line at any time.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us another short story about what heaven is going to be like. Worker's get hired at different times to work in the vineyard. At the end of the day...everyone gets paid the same wage. "Not fair", said some of the workers, "we worked longer and harder and should get paid more."

When it comes to heaven the prize for those who run the race regardless of when they join is the same...heaven. There is no such thing as more or less of heaven. There is no second place or third place in heaven. There is first place...and nothing better. And because we know the prize is waiting for us...we want to enjoy all the blessings we get from having a relationship with God our Father now...the same kind of relationship Jesus has with him.

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 to us, "Well done. Take the prize that is waiting for you".

