

IV TRINITY 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ROMANS 8.18 ST. LUKE 6.36



One of the most vivid memories I have of my childhood in the Texas Panhandle was the road trip we often took during the summer from our home in Hereford to Amarillo fifty miles north.

We would invariably encounter one of those sudden summer thunderstorms the Texas Panhandle is famous for...it would rain so hard driving was impossible...and dangerous. Twenty minutes later...the sun came out...we could see clearly and resume our road trip.

In 1972, singer/songwriter Johnny Nash wrote a song called "I Can See Clearly Now":

*I can see clearly now the rain is gone
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright)
Bright (bright) sun-shining day
It's gonna be a bright (bright)
Bright (bright) sun-shining day*

The song is about hope and courage for those who have experienced adversity in their lives and overcame it. It is largely based on real-life obstacles Nash faced...and the joy he experienced when the obstacles disappeared and everything was clear on a bright shining day.

We often set up obstacles in our lives that cloud our judgment. These obstacles keep us from experiencing God's love as we should...they separate us from others and prevent us from loving them as we should. Like the Texas thunderstorm that makes for dangerous driving...we need to have thunderstorms clouding our spiritual lives cleared away...so we can see clearly what's ahead.

One obstacle to our seeing clearly is the tendency we have to be overly harsh and petty in judging others. We're often quick to find fault in another person's actions...we're just as quick to dismiss the same or worse actions in ourselves. Jesus calls this hypocrisy. We end up becoming the obstacle in our own lives...and we can become an obstacle preventing another person from seeing clearly.

We need to be careful we don't misunderstand what Jesus means when he tells us in the Gospel, "Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you." We are supposed to judge another person's bad behavior...we are not supposed to be judgmental...there is a difference.

God sees us the way we really are...he knows the disposition of our hearts at all times. We need to try to see ourselves...including our faults...the way we really are. That means admitting we have faults and asking God to forgive us. Only when we face up to our own faults...and clear out the obstacles in our way...are we in a position to help others.

The Summary of the Law heard at the beginning of every Mass is the standard that governs are behavior and others: Love God above everything else; love others as we want to be loved. Christian love means acting for the good of others. We are supposed to help others overcome obstacles in their lives...the unhealthy and destructive behavior...that keep them from experiencing God's love to the fullest. Whatever we do for others must always be done with humility, compassion, mercy, and love.

Saint Paul tells us that we can all expect obstacles to get in our way during this lifetime...what he calls "the things that we suffer at this present time." They can be Texas-sized physical obstacles that cause us literally to fall down. They can be health-related issues that challenge us. They can be spiritual thunderstorms that cause us to lose sight of God. And we need to make certain we aren't the obstacles keeping other people and ourselves from experiencing God's love.

Obstacles...we can't let them defeat us. That's what we're asking for in the Collect...that God will help us clear the obstacles out of our way...that he will keep us from falling down...and in spite of life's challenges...we never lose sight of that place where we will see God clearly as he wants.

For now...there are no dark clouds than can stop us from enjoying the Light of Christ...the Light of the World.

