

VII TRINITY 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ROMANS 6.19-23

✠

God is all powerful...the Collect tells us...he is the source and giver of everything that is good...he implants in our hearts the love we have toward him and others...he helps our faith grow...and continues to nourish us through Word and Sacrament.

The Collect beautifully and effectively answers a question we often ask ourselves: What is grace? It is the subject of today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Just what is grace...and what does it do to enhance our lives?

In "church speak" grace is *"the love and mercy given to us by God because he wants us to have it, not necessarily because of anything we have done to earn it. It is not a created substance of any kind. Grace is the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become his children and partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life."*

Grace is dynamic and transformative. Theologians have developed a complex system to describe various kinds of grace and what they are supposed to accomplish. But spending an inordinate amount of time analyzing grace turns it into an equation to be solved...rather than God's free gift for us to enjoy.

Because grace transforms our lives for the better we want to walk as God's children...as children who follow the Light of Christ. Paul uses the word "slavery" to talk about our lives before and after God's free gift of grace was implanted in our hearts.

Slavery as an institution was a fact of life in the ancient world. Saint Paul was confronted with the reality of slavery everywhere he went. Like Jesus, Paul draws upon his everyday experiences in the letters he writes to the Church. He tells us he is writing to us in everyday language we will understand and to pay attention!

Paul was aware of his own weaknesses. He talks about them extensively and that's what makes him so believable. He knew God's free

gift of grace empowered him to do good works. He asked himself why he continued to backslide. We ask ourselves the same question...if we have God's grace...why do we continue to backslide?

God has free will to do as he pleases and so do we. God gives us an abundance of his grace to help us say and do the right things. But he will not force us to do what is right. He wants us to come to the conclusion on our own that resisting his love and grace ultimately makes our lives messier.

Paul equates backsliding to being a slave without any freedom. Slaves have no control over their lives. Sin controls our lives. We don't want to be slaves to sin...which is anything that keeps us from walking as God's children.

C.S. Lewis said the concept of forgiveness is a wonderful thing until we are forced to admit we actually need to be forgiven. We must then face up to the tendency we all have at times to say and do things that clearly are not consistent with God's will.

We experience God's incredible mercy when we admit to our selves we sometimes do the things we shouldn't or fail to do the things we should. God is always ready to forgive. Making positive changes in our lives allows his grace to continue to transform our lives and we are then using our free will as he intended.

Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that accepting God's forgiveness without making any effort to change was nothing more than "cheap grace". To quote Pastor Bonhoeffer...

...“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.”

Our job during this lifetime is to use our free will to avoid those things that keep us slaves to ourselves and cheapen God's free gift of grace. God gives us his grace to help us...we just have to ask for it...and do our very best to follow through in our commitment to say and do the right things.

✠