

SEPTUAGESIMA 2020

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

1 COR. 9.24-27 ST. MATT. 20.1-16



We're running a race...Saint Paul reminds us...not like the Track and Field events of the Ancient and Modern Olympics. Athletes who won the race in Paul's time received a crown of laurel leaves. Athletes today who win the 400-meter race get a gold medal.

Christians are running the race called life...but we're not competing against other people for the grand prize. We're running a spiritual race...against the world, the flesh and the Devil. The difference...we already have the grand prize...everlasting life...won for us by Christ.

If we already have the grand prize...why bother to run the race at all? Why not just sit back and enjoy life? Any sports fan knows the team that wants to make it to the Super Bowl has to work hard. They have to practice long hours. Even if our favorite team makes it to the Super Bowl...there's no guarantee they will win.

Christians run the race called life precisely because we already own the grand prize and we know what Jesus did to make certain it was ours forever. We also need to pay attention to what Paul says about Christian life...isn't always easy. We have to practice, practice, practice...through prayer to keep ourselves strong and resistant against those things in life that could cause us to fall down. In short...it's hard work being a Christian...and its work we should cherish.

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".

Paul is saying we should live our lives with fasting and prayer and most importantly by making certain we don't lose sight of the grand prize by giving ourselves over to the world, the flesh and the Devil and causing others to fall down.

The Pre-Lenten Season is a transitional season between Epiphany and Lent. We have a chance to get our feet wet and take a look at the players' spiritual handbook that will guide us into Lent. The color green used through most of Epiphany has given way to violet. Things are about to get more serious.

Lent is 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. We pray a lot...Saint Paul tells us we should always be praying. We pray corporately at the Sunday Parish Mass. We must set time aside each day for private prayer...conversation with God. We should include daily Bible reading...the players' handbook. This is all part of running the race...and how we practice, practice, practice.

The Gospel reading teaches us it's never too late to start practicing. We do have to answer 'yes' to his invitation and be thankful in the work we do here on earth. The Gospel makes it clear anyone can answer 'yes' and at any time. The prize is still the same no matter when we start. We can't have more or less of heaven. There is no such thing as a better seat at the table for those of us who have been running the race our entire lives...or those who just started.

We already have the prize and it's the best prize of all...everlasting life. 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".

