

## SEXAGESIMA 2020

### SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

#### FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

*II COR. 11.19-21 St. LUKE 8.4-15*

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We're running the race called Christian Life...Saint Paul told us last week. We already own the grand prize. We get to claim it when we get to heaven. While we are running the race...we have to be persistent in everything we do...in our daily prayers...in going to church...and in our love for each other.

Speaking of love...last Friday was Valentine's Day and today is Sexagesima. Paul's letters to the various churches emphasize Christian love...doing the right thing for others. Valentine's Day is about Hallmark cards...and heart-shaped boxes of chocolate...all good expressions of love. But Christian love is more than a box of chocolates.

Saint Valentine was a priest who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The Roman Emperor Claudius declared Christianity illegal ...Christian worship even in private carried a death sentence if caught. Valentine was arrested after he was caught performing Christian marriages for young couples...which kept the man from being drafted into the army.

Claudius is reported to have liked Valentine but had him executed for his refusal to deny Christ. Before he died, Valentine healed his jailer's daughter of blindness. On his way to his execution...Valentine is said to have handed the young girl a note that read "from your Valentine"...a possible inspiration for today's Hallmark cards.

If we're looking for a connection between Valentine's Day and Sexagesima it has to be love. Paul wrote two letters to the Church in Corinth, a city that still exists today in modern day Greece. We read from his first letter last week...about persistence and running the race. In the same letter he writes love is the greatest gift God has given us and he expects us to use it properly.

The Corinthians didn't listen to what Paul was saying, and continued to act very badly. They came to church drunk...they tried to make others feel less spiritually gifted...they were gossiping...they were forgetting what true Christian love was about...they tolerated foolish behavior directed at them.

In today's Epistle, Paul displays some justifiable anger toward the Corinthians. He tells them to stop acting like fools and quit complaining about how hard life is. If they want to know something about a how hard life can be... he could tell them a few stories about his own life...foolish talk was getting them nowhere.

Paul's "tough love" approach was intended to get the Corinthians to stop their infighting and recommit themselves to being a community based on Christian faith, hope and love. He wanted them to run the race...be persistent in prayer...and not get discouraged when times got tough.

Saint Valentine ran the race and he didn't give up. He wasn't afraid to profess his belief in Jesus Christ, even though he knew it meant almost certain death. He didn't get discouraged, because he was ready to receive the crown of life in heaven.

We learn from reading Saint Paul's letters and from the lives of Saints of God like Valentine what it means to practice unconditional Christian love.

The theme of our Lenten Study this year will be "It's all about prayer". We know God hears and answers our prayers. We know he loves us, so we don't get discouraged when things don't go the way we think they should.

We love God and each other and should be persistent in everything we do in our lives...just like our Valentine.

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