

Septuagesima 2021
Sermon - Father Craig Looney
Saint Joseph Parish
1 Cor. 9.24-27 St. Matt. 20.1-16



Is life fair? We only have to observe the world around us to come to the conclusion life isn't fair. We shouldn't be surprised. Jesus never promised if we follow him life would always be fair. Like everyone else, Christians experience the roller coaster called life...with its ups and downs...and hairpin turns...and things that are fair and not so fair. The difference is what's waiting for us after this life.

Both of today's readings help answer the question about fairness...now during life on Earth...and later in heaven. We all know people who seem to have life easy...as if they have heaven on earth. We know other people who have hard lives...as if they are living hell on earth. Often we find ourselves somewhere in the middle.

The Gospel is one of Jesus' short stories about what heaven is like. We meet a man who owns a vineyard. He hires men to work in his vineyard at 6 o'clock in the morning and they agree to work for a day's wages...let's say for \$100. The vineyard owner hires more men at noon, 9 o'clock, 3 o'clock and 5 o'clock. All of the men hired agree to work for \$100.

When the day's work is done and it is time to pay the men...the vineyard owner has his foreman pay the men \$100...starting with those who worked just one hour and ending with those who worked a 12-hour shift. Those that worked a full day grumbled about how unfair their employer was...after all...they spent the day getting sunburned. But Jesus isn't giving us a lesson in labor relations...he's giving us a lesson in what it will be like in heaven...and what is fair in God's eyes.

In the Epistle, Saint Paul says the Christian Life is a lot like running a race in which there is only one Grand Prize. Athletes who hope to win the prize must continually train if they hope to complete the race and win the prize. Athletes who get lazy and don't train can have no expectation of finishing the race...much less winning the prize.

Our lives in Christ are like running a race toward the finish line with a major difference...we already have the Grand Prize.

We continue to run the race of life so we don't lose the Grand Prize. That means we have to continually train and discipline ourselves by attending Mass, praying and fasting, giving money away and helping others.

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."

Everyone who crosses the finish line gets the Grand Prize. There is no such thing as a Second or Third Prize. And while life now may not seem fair at times...what Saint Paul is telling us is to remain focused on the Grand Prize and keep ourselves disciplined. We should invite others to join us in the race...and they can join the race at any time. That seems fair.

The Gospel is ultimately about our relationship with God and committing ourselves to a life with Christ. The sooner we get on board and start working in the vineyard...the sooner we can begin enjoying the blessings God sends our way. When it comes to getting paid for our work...everyone gets the same pay...heaven. There is no more or less of heaven. There is no more or less everlasting life. There is no more or less God. That seems fair too.

Both the Epistle and the Gospel are about running the race of life and claiming the Grand Prize in heaven. On that day we want to stand with Saint Paul and all of the other Saints who have crossed the finish line 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. Take the prize that is waiting for you". And that is more than fair!

