

Septuagesima 2023  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney

*1 Cor. 9.24-27 St. Matt. 20.1-16*



How many of us are fans of TV game shows? Regardless of the game...the object is the same. One contestant wants to beat the others and walk away the grand prize.

TV game shows are like running a race...against the clock. Contestants have a limited amount of time...literally only seconds...to ask the correct question, guess the right answer, or solve the puzzle. The winner takes all. The losers get consolation prizes...or nothing at all.

The Christian Life according to Saint Paul is also like running a race...with one major difference...we already have the Grand Prize...everlasting life...and there is no consolation prize to everlasting life in heaven. That doesn't mean we get to spend our lives here on earth..."resting on our laurels".

Athletes of Paul's time took their sports no less seriously than today's athletes. They spent a lot of time training for the races and boxing matches they hoped to win. The winners received crowns made of laurel leaves. Those crowns were beautiful to look at but they did not last. In the end, all those men had left was the praise of their fans and memories of their accomplishments.

Paul believed the Christian Life demanded as much spiritual discipline as the physical discipline required for anyone competing in sports events. Everything, he said, has to be done for the Gospel's sake. Good News means good and consistent training for our selves and others we invite to join us in the Christian race of life.

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".*

What Paul means is the trainer cannot break the rules of the game in which he has instructed others. He runs the risk of losing the Grand Prize himself by expecting others to play by the rules when he isn't playing by the rules himself.

If the Epistle is about Paul comparing the Christian Life to running a race toward the finish line and the Grand Prize...life everlasting in heaven...the Gospel is about the Grand Prize...the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says the Kingdom of heaven is like a man who owns a vineyard and he needs men to work the vineyard. He goes out to hire men at different times of the day. They all agree to work in the vineyard for the regular wage...a silver coin.

When it comes time to pay the men...everyone received the same pay. The men who had worked all day were angry. They thought they deserved more than the men who had worked only an hour. The man owns the vineyard tells the men he has the right to do as he wishes with his own money. Jesus concludes his short story with the famous line...

*..."So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last."*

English Roman Catholic priest and theologian Monsignor Ronald Knox (1888-1957) expressed it this way in his comment on today's readings...

*..."Septuagesima has an epistle which warns us it is never too late to be damned, a gospel which tells us it is never too late to be saved."*

We already have the Grand Prize and it's better than any other prize...everlasting life in heaven. That's a good reason to run the race ahead of us. When we see God 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, "We have done our best in the race. We have run the full distance, and we have kept the Faith. And now there is waiting for us the prize of victory...not only for us, but to all who wait with love for him to appear".

And God will say, "Well done. The prize is yours".

