

## IV Trinity 2024

### Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

#### Father Craig Looney

*Romans 8.18-23 St. Luke 6.36-42*



Obstacles...are those things that get in our way and keep us from making progress. Last year's rain and wind created physical barriers...downed trees and power lines...that made driving hazardous and made getting where we needed to be a challenge.

Job stress, strained relationships or any situation that doesn't turn out as we had hoped can be obstacles, especially when everything seems to happen all at once. Obstacles like pride and anger can also get in the way of our Spiritual lives and keep us from seeing our way clearly...they cloud our relationship with God and others.

In this morning's Gospel Jesus gives us a lesson in mercy, judgment, overcoming obstacles that get in our way, and God's unconditional love. Quite often, we place unreasonable expectations on other people as conditions for receiving our love. We may judge another person's behavior as unacceptable.

Jesus isn't telling us we shouldn't judge someone's actions that are clearly out of order. But he is telling us we shouldn't judge them harshly or cruelly, especially if we don't have all the facts that would allow us to make a correct judgment. We may condemn someone for what we consider bad behavior. That's not OK.

Jesus makes it very clear we are perfectly free to condemn bad behavior; we are never free to condemn other people, because God doesn't condemn them. God is always ready to show mercy and forgiveness. We must always be ready to show mercy and forgiveness to others, if we expect God to forgive us.

God gives us an abundance of grace to help us show compassion and mercy toward others. God is generous in the grace he gives us. The more we tap into his grace, the more we are able to show the kind of love and compassion toward others he expects us to show. The standard God uses to judge us is the same standard we use to judge others.

In the two short parables which follow...*the blind leading the blind* and *the speck in our brother's eye*...Jesus is telling us to take care of the obstacles messing up our own spiritual lives first, before we can even think about trying to help someone overcome the obstacles hurting their spiritual lives.

We learned in last week's Gospel we become overly critical of another person's behavior when we see in them something of our own bad behavior. We ignore our own faults and focus our attention on petty fault-finding in others. We don't want to become obstacles getting in the way of other people's spiritual journeys.

We don't like to admit we have pet sins...those obstacles that keep us from seeing our way clearly...things that get in our way of loving God and loving others. We can't expect to help others experience God's love and mercy if we are spiritually blind. How can we expect to help the guy with a speck of dust in his eye when we can't see straight because of the big log in our eyes? We can't, and that's why we rely on God's mercy and compassion and love to lead us so we can lead others to him.

In the Epistle, Saint Paul talks about obstacles and challenges we can expect to face during this lifetime. He tells us whatever trials and challenges we face cannot compare at all to the glory that God will reveal to us. Paul knew about trials and tribulations...he experienced more than we will ever experience. But he tells us not to lose our faith and get discouraged.

In the Collect we acknowledge God protects those who trust in him; he keeps our faith strong and makes us holy. And we ask him to help us during this lifetime and give us hope for what we have not yet seen...things eternal.

When obstacles get in the way of our spiritual growth...and they sometimes do...our job is to confront them head on...and ask God to give us strength and wisdom to see our way clearly.

