

5th Sunday of Lent, Cycle C: Mar. 21st, 2010

This is an exciting time of year for me! Now many of you would think that it's because that Holy Week and Easter are just around the corner. Well, up to a point, that's true. However, I'm excited because of something else: **It's the start of baseball season!** Now, I personally think that baseball is one of the greatest games that we have because it's both a team and individual sport. When the ball is hit to you, you have to field it. There's no blending into the background and finding a place to hide, you have to make the play. And, the same is true when you are standing at the plate. It's just you against the pitcher and no one can swing for you. These are but two (2) examples of what makes baseball so dramatically appealing to me.

Baseball takes a tremendous amount of focus and concentration if you want to play the game well. And, it's not too much different when it comes to the spiritual life. St. Paul knew that and he preached it with a single-mindedness that's unparalleled in the Christian Tradition. And, one of the metaphors that he used to describe discipleship was that of a "race". For St. Paul, the Christian journey was a race toward a goal--- life with God. For Paul, it was important to persevere in faith, day-in and day-out. Because he knew that temptations could get the best of us, if we weren't careful. He also knew that it was easy to lose sight of the "prize"; thus, we were encouraged to strain forward toward our goal, because looking back can often have unforeseen consequences. That's not just true in sports, but also in the spiritual life. In the spiritual life there are many distractions--- temptations, former hurts, grudges, past mistakes --- and the list goes on and on. But, one of the greatest distractions that can have a drastically negative impact on our spiritual lives is to judge others. Remember Jesus' rebuke in our Gospel Reading: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the 1st to throw a stone at her." We become so obsessed with what everyone else is doing in the world that we stop being vigilant in our own lives, especially our spiritual lives.

It seems pretty clear that in the moral life, our first responsibility is to ourselves. It's one of the only times that we get to be selfish, if I'm permitted to use that term. We need to focus on ourselves and on our journey and we need that single-mindedness that Paul knew was so important because once we become convinced that others are what's wrong with the world, we're on dangerously slippery ground, spiritually. Because an excessive focus on the faults and sins of others puts the "prize" in jeopardy not so much for them, but for us.

My friends, we all know that leading the Christian life is never easy. And many that claim to be under that banner don't do it very well and I'm not just talking about those of us not gathered here today. We only have to look around us in our world and our community to see the brokenness that is present. However, leading and living the Christian life never begins with what others are doing, it begins with us. So, let's not drop the ball or strike out because the stakes are too high. For it is essential to remain focused on the example that the Lord has set for us and live in anticipation of the beautiful and wonderful things that will come to be, if we only do our part and strive for the "prize".