

The Fourth Sunday After Trinity
July 5, 2009

Epistle Reading - Romans 8: 18-23

Gospel Reading - Luke 6: 36-42

“...Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting for adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” [Romans 8: 23]

The Goal of Salvation:

If we look at today’s Epistle and Gospel together, we see laid out before us our goal and the means to reach it. Paul wrote about the goal to the Romans in the Epistle: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting for adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” [Romans 8: 22-23] What he was talking about was the goal of salvation. He pointed out that salvation was a progressive process: a goal to which we are continually moving toward with hope...a goal we strive to reach by progressively building and linking one experience with the Lord with another...and another...and another. For all intents and purposes, we want to build a stairway of hope to cross from this life to the next with the goal of salvation.

The Stairway to Salvation:

Since we don’t know how long our set of stairs needs to be because the length of our time in this life unknown to us, we need to look at our stairway to salvation through the lense of quality...We need to look at the structure of it...at its strength...at its endurance. We need to examine the experiences which make up this set of stairs and seek out those that will continuously improve our relationship with God.

Building the Stairs to Salvation-Mercy and Non-Judgmental:

The means for evaluating and improving our stairway to salvation is in today’s Gospel. Jesus’ message to his audience and to us could be looked as a checklist for what is needed to construct a sturdy set of stairs. He began with mercy...that trait that embodies such an array of behaviors and attitudes, ranging from tolerance, to compassion to sympathy and empathy. We are urged to be merciful, “as your Father also is merciful.” [Luke 6:36] Secondly, Our Lord told us to be non-judgmental: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.” [Luke 6: 37] To be tolerant and non-judgmental of all whom we encounter is a difficult task... A task which requires being aware of and dealing with our stereotypes in such areas a race and gender...A task which requires us to view people as individuals who are accountable to God, rather than us, for the choices they make in their lives...A task where we must not make judgments about the beliefs and values of others, lest we be judged on ours. If we had a quarter for each time we made snap judgments or stereotyped others, we’d be wealthy in this world, but in

abject poverty in the next. To be judgmental of the character of another is to make the arrogant assumption that we can take the place of God and do His judging for him.

Building the Stairs to Salvation-Forgiveness:

The third item on the checklist is forgiveness: “forgive and ye shall be forgiven.” The power of forgiveness cannot be understated. If our spouses, families and friends didn’t forgive us time and time again, we would be a society of isolated individuals, estranged from most of the people we associate with. We cannot be forgiven by God until we find it in our hearts to forgive others. I would not like to be the one to climb the stairway of an individual I knew who did not speak with her elderly parents for fifteen years because of perceived wrongs she thought they had done to her...she could not find it in her heart to forgive them and ask for their forgiveness before they died. Our stairs go nowhere if we don’t let those life time grudges melt away and square things through forgiveness...whether the forgiveness be face-to-face or in our hearts.

Building the Stairs to Salvation-Giving:

The fourth item on our Lord’s checklist is giving freely of ourselves: our time...our talent...our treasure. Not giving and grabbing...not giving to get something, but giving with no expectation of something in return. Recall what Jesus said in today’s Gospel: “Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.” [Luke 6:38] If our giving is selfless, we will receive in return much more than we give. The kind of giving Jesus talked about means that our hearts and minds are focused upon the next life, rather than this one... that we truly know that no matter how much material wealth we amass in this life, we can’t take it with us...that we realize that the only boundaries to giving of our time and our talents are the ones that we impose on ourselves.

The Means-Finding Meaning:

The means to put Jesus’ checklist of what is needed to build our stairways to salvation into operation is underlined by the parables he related to his audience. The first deals with leading a life with meaning. Our Lord asks, “Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?” [Luke 6:39] We look for a meaning to life and search for ways to bring meaning to our lives. Some latch onto whatever guru is presently in vogue... Others look to the mega-churches and their feel-good/don’t worry-be happy message...Others don’t have a clue. Most of us want what we do here to have some meaning, yet many never find it. Unless our perceptions of our world have been lighted by that revelation of the meaning of life which comes from God, then we and our blind colleagues will continue to follow others who are blind to the true meaning of life and will indeed fall into the ditch.

The Means-Self Examination:

The second method of implementing the checklist is self-examination: “cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull the mote that is in your brother’s eye.” [Luke 6:42] Jesus was not talking about taking something out of someone’s eye...He was talking about self-

criticism:...being able to look at our own blind spots and faults...being able to take feedback from others and incorporating it into improving our behavior and attitude. He was talking about examining ourselves, casting off those behaviors which are detrimental to our relationship to Him and to others, and doing those things that will bring us closer to God.

The Advantage of Self-Examination:

Self examination can be a painful process. It takes strength and resolve to survey our weaknesses...our failings... and our darker motivations. If we don't see an advantage to taking stock of ourselves, chances are we won't do it. Yet the advantage of self examination is clear: each time we search ourselves...each time we come to terms with our sins...each time we own up to them... and , if we are using our self-examination as a preparation for a sacramental confession, each time we receive absolution, we build another step in our stairway to salvation

Conclusion:

Our Epistle for today re-established our goal of obtaining salvation and gave us meaning for this life...Today's Gospel listed the attitudes: mercy, being non-judgmental, forgiveness, and selfless giving, and the method of discovering the meaning of life through God and self-examination for goal attainment. May we recognize that our time in this life to meet this goal is short..let us pray for God's help that through His Church, His Holy Scriptures and His Sacraments, we may use the tools he has given us to build and strengthen our stairways to salvation. May we find meaning in what Paul wrote to the Romans and us about working toward salvation, that "Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting for adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"