

Homily For Tuesday of the 13th Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - June 29, 2021

(Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul)

Finish the Race

Introduction

A teacher asked her grade two class who they thought would have the biggest crown in heaven. That was a tough one for them, but one boy suggested tentatively: Maybe the one with the biggest head?

2 Timothy

In his letter to his dear friend, Timothy, St. Paul was in prison, in Rome, contemplating his impending execution and departure from this life. Having been totally faithful to Christ, he knew with great confidence that that he would be with the one who had told him years ago how much he would have to suffer for the Good News. Now Paul knew that Christ, the righteous judge, awaited him with a "crown of righteousness." It is quite right for you and I today, to ask what is this crown, will there be one that fits us, and what faithfulness will be required of us to gain it?

The images Paul uses for this faithfulness are that of "fighting the good fight" and of "finishing the race." I think it is very significant that St. Paul does not say that he **won** that fight or that race, but only that he fought well and that he finished.

I am a big fan of racing, not of cars but of people. Triathlon is my sport so I love to watch elite men and women triathletes, especially in person when I am at an event to race against my own age group. My wife and I are both fans of a young woman from Edmonton. Her name is Paula Findlay. In the 2012 Olympics in London, she was a favourite. Just the previous year, she had been on top of the triathlon world, winning many races. But injury and bad coaching left her vulnerable. She didn't win. In fact, Paula finished 50th - dead last. To me, it was one of the most inspirational things I have ever witnessed in sport. Very few

would have subjected themselves to the embarrassment of the whole world watching her crying as she willed herself over those last few hundred meters with the world watching on television, then afterwards apologizing to all Canadians for her failure.

Peter and Paul

We have much detail about the many injuries and the many failures both St. Peter and St. Paul experienced. We know about their discouragement and their tears. So many of those tears were because of their intense awareness of their own failures. We are inspired by them again today, perhaps even because of those failures. In those ways, they are us, in our failures and our tears.

Peter was an uneducated fisherman. Paul was a highly educated Pharisee. Both of them received a name change from our Lord, to indicate the same calling to each of them to give their lives for the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The very strong tradition of the Church from earliest times is that Peter and Paul were executed, by the Emperor Nero, on the same day a year apart. This would not be surprising because it was likely a feast day for a major Roman god, and it was typical to execute political prisoners as part of the celebrations. Both Apostles, while in prison, had time to contemplate the end of their lives of proclaiming Christ crucified and risen.

Even in the early 4th century, on this solemn memorial, the pope would celebrate mass at St. Peter's, then travel to the church of St. Paul Outside the Walls on the same day, to celebrate mass there as well.

Matthew

The Good News that these two great Apostles fought for is highlighted in today's passage from Matthew. It is not possible to overestimate the importance of this passage. Catholics are not known for memorizing scripture and it's not a strength of mine, for sure. However, there are a few that we must know about and to be able to find. This is one of those. Matthew, Chapter 16, especially verse 18. Jesus takes them to a city dedicated to Caesar, the ultimate worldly authority. There he

asks his Apostles: Who do you say that I am? Peter answers: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus says: You are Peter, the rock, upon whom I will build MY Church. Even hell will not defeat it. Matthew 16:18. Commit to knowing this passage. It is our assurance that no hell the church is undergoing now, and it is undergoing assaults from hell, will be able to defeat it.

Call To Action

What keeps you and me from fighting that good fight or finishing the race? Fear and shame are great enemies. They make our knees too weak to fight or to run. In anticipation of Christ's victory over human fears, the psalmist already knows that the Lord is the one who sets us from our fears. Jesus Christ it is who, by taking on our fight, our race, has won FOR us that crown.

God has not asked you and I to win the race. He has asked us to finish it. God has not asked you and I to win any of the fights we encounter in life. He has asked us to fight well. God has not asked you and I to seek any old crown of glory. He has asked us to stand with him and call on him who has not only fought the good fight against the forces of darkness that assail and terrify us.

What peace and joy await us. Even in our most difficult fights or when we don't have the heart to finish the race, Jesus Christ is right next to us with the strength we need, if we will only ask for this grace. That same Christ will present to us a crown of righteousness, not because we won but because we finished, for he has gloriously triumphed. To him be glory forever and ever, Amen.