

The two sides of the coin

Homily for September 8, 2022
Friday 23rd week of Ordinary Time

The reading from 1 Corinthians that was just read seems such a fitting passage in light of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Like St. Paul, the Queen was a woman who for 70 years lived with purpose her life of service and dedication to the People of the Commonwealth. She ran the race before her right to the end and lived a life where her faith in God was explicitly evident. Today as we think of St. Paul's words, may Queen Elizabeth's life exemplify this text for us.

When we think of St Paul his life was lived with such total dedication to Christ that was like a coin. One side of the coin was St. Paul's delight in the beloved – Jesus. The other side was sacrifice for the beloved; In this passage we see St Paul celebrate that he uses both side of the coin where delight in Jesus and sacrifice for him blend together.

He is compelled to preach the Gospel sacrificially because of the delight he has for the one who is at the heart of the Gospel's proclamation, Jesus. It is for this reason that he talks about becoming all things to all people so that he might attract them to Jesus.

This means that St. Paul was able to interact with a wide range of people, both Jews and non-Jews, people with very different cultural expressions and backgrounds. He met people where they were so that he may win some. Although St. Paul desired that all would come to know Jesus and believe and follow him he was a realist and so he states:

I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings¹

What was the blessing for St. Paul? To see people come to know Christ and the blessing of proclaiming by word and witness what he speaks of at the end of the passage for this morning. He knows with such clarity that this life is not an aimless and meaningless existence but one that has a direction and a finish line that is best described as a race. Just as an athlete will discipline their body in order to win a temporal race, St. Paul says that we are in an eternal race and the prize is commensurate to the nature of the race:

Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one²

Today's psalm captures the straining of the Christian runner for the finis line:

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (1 Co 9:22–23). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (1 Co 9:25). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

***My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.³***

This is the longing of the heart of the one who like St. Paul delights to sacrificially serve Jesus.

Both St. Paul and in Queen Elizabeth II lived with the realization that their lives were not their own to be held onto. Rather they knew that the life they had been given was to be shared with others and given away. When given away, material gifts no longer belong to the giver; when shared, spiritual gifts grow in the one sharing.⁴

There is a physical and spiritual law that what we don't use we lose. A muscle that is never used withers. A conviction never shared will grow weaker in the one who holds it. This is also true of one's Christian faith. That is why you will find the strongest faith in those who give themselves to some kind of ministry, even if it is an active sharing of their faith with their families, their friends, and co-workers. The waters of the Jordan River feed two seas, the smaller Sea of Galilee and the much larger Dead Sea. Fish live in abundance in the Sea of Galilee; nothing lives in the Dead Sea. The difference? The Sea of Galilee passes on the water it receives; the Dead Sea just receives without giving. A parable of life. A parable for gospel living⁵.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (Ps 84:2). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ Montague, G. T. (2011). [*First Corinthians*](#) (p. 160). Baker Academic.

⁵ Montague, G. T. (2011). [*First Corinthians*](#) (p. 160). Baker Academic.