



SAINT MARGARET
PARISH

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

30 January 2010

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One day a young couple decided to take their six year old son, Connor on his first bowling adventure. Upon arriving at the bowling lanes, Mom and Dad explained to him that the object of the game was to get the highest number. He had an awesome time playing, and with a little help from his parents he won the game. Connor was on top of the world! Since he had such a great time bowling, the next weekend his parents decided to introduce him to miniature golf. However, Connor still “flying high” from his bowling win, he did not want any direction from his parents. He thought he did not need their help and could do it on his own. His parents asked if they could help show him how to keep his score but he said he could do it on his own. After each hole, his Dad would report a 4, his Mom 5 and Connor would not announce his score but simply write it down with a smile on his face he could not contain. Finally, they completed the game and Connor insisted tallying up the scores. Connor announced, Dad your score was 54, Mom yours was 63. With great pride Connor announced, mine was 114...so I guess I won again. However, Connor soon found out that his inflated score made him lose the game as the rules were not the same in golf as they were in bowling...the higher number is not better. We play differently depending on the rules.

However, isn't it true that we live life differently, depending on the rules we think we should follow. Jesus, in Matthew's gospel lays out for the believers what we call the Beatitudes. He teaches them that being humble, merciful and peaceful is the way to live. Despite the fact that the world teaches us that these are signs of weakness, in God's eyes, these are ways in which we show how strong our love for God is. Jesus tells His followers that even when they are insulted, hated and even persecuted, rejoice for their reward will be great.

I think it is important to note that He shared this not with the whole crowd but Matthew tells us, with the disciples that gathered around Him. These were already people wanting to follow Him and be led by His Word. In a sense, similar to us gathered today. Yet as we hear this gospel, I wonder if we are ever tempted to feel validated when we think we are living out these beatitudes. How often do we boast of our frequent mass attendance, our kindness to others, how we have stripped ourselves of worldly pleasures and spend hours in prayers. What great and dedicated followers we must be to accomplish all these things!

Yet, brothers and sisters, here in lies the danger that Paul cautions us against in the second reading. In a very sobering way, Paul basically reminds us that all of us, including himself, are really nothing. No matter what we do or say, in and of itself speaks nothing of our own glory. Instead, all the good we do or at least try to do, should draw us to God. God is the source and reason for any good we accomplish. Paul tells us, Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord.”

This is a real danger for us as believers because we can become lulled into an experience or understanding that we are independent, we are holy people all on our own. Look at the good we do compared to others. Just like Connor after winning the bowling game thought he did not need any help with golf and then utterly failed, so too will we fail when we boast in ourselves instead of the Lord.

In trying to grasp God's role in our life, consider the sun. Every day, at every moment, the sun pours out light and energy into our world. Whether the earth is close to the sun or not, whether we are turned towards it or away from does not matter. Even when clouds get in between us and the sun, the sun never stops shining. If the sun stopped for one second, we would freeze and die instantly. And so are our lives with God. Every moment of our lives, He pours love into our very being which enables us to do what we do. His constant and unconditional love sustains us! It is not us on our own.

This does not mean that we are to degrade or diminish who we are as people. Now this sense of humbleness too can get out of hand as we can embody a false sense of humbleness where we seek to draw attention to ourselves. Rather, our goal as believers is to recognize we are fully dependent on God. This means that we should see God's power in our lives. We gather at every mass praying during the penitential rite, Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy not to minimize our value but rather we stand in a moment of recognition. We realize that not one of us here is worthy to be called to hear Him speak to us in Scripture or be fed by Him in the Eucharist, yet here we are.

As we unworthily gather around the Lord as did the disciples in hearing the beatitudes let us be sure to hear and listen to the Lord speaking to us. Only then can we boast, not in an ill-informed way like Connor but rooted in the truth that whatever good we do in life is a gift from a God that continuously pours His love into us. Indeed we have much to be boastful of. Let us indeed, boast in the Lord!