

**SEPTUAGESIMA 2012**  
**SERMON-CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER JOHN ALTBERG**  
**I CORINTHIANS 9.24 MATTHEW 20. 1**

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*CHOOSE THE RIGHT RACE* COUNSELS ST PAUL! *CHOOSE THE WRONG ONE AND EVEN IF YOU WIN YOU WILL ULTIMATELY BE DISAPPOINTED.*

The athletic theme of St Paul's writing could well catalyze counsel about the impending Superbowl, or political "contests/races" that become the obsessive displacement of things that really matter. No...I'm NOT suggesting politics isn't about critical choices.

The dramatic metaphor of the Epistle is often among the least well understood...that of the CORRUPTIBLE CROWN...it refers to the laurel wreath commonly awarded winners of athletic events in the ancient Greek culture...we see them on statues of original Olympians.

The shining comfort and prestige of laurel 'CORRUPTS'...gives way ultimately to dryness, loss of brilliance, the leaves fall and leave only a ring of sticks that may ultimately feel like thorns. Not an attractive proposition...

St Paul was not making a far reach with the metaphor of the laurel wreath for he wrote to a group of Greek Corinthians well familiar with these athletic contests and the accompanying prizes.

Did they 'get it'...probably some but not all. More importantly...have we got the message...?

The metaphor of a race, in fact, a marathon, assuredly resonates as enter this week...one filled with an extraordinarily full plate of parish activity...well worth it as we look forward to our visit from Archbishop Haverland.

How about other "races" in our lives...simply stated, make certain you are in the right one(s)...the ones that will mean something in the end. It's called sifting the choices and making good ones...something only you can evaluate.

Today the Church takes what could easily be termed a "mood swing"...after just 5 weeks of increasing light we take what seems a lurching change into an opposite, somber

tone...Pre-Lent shifts our gears...things take on a new level of intensity.

What's the point? Some illuminating history....the season developed in 6c. Italy was overtaken by strife and unrest...

Lombard invasion  
barbarians  
earthquakes  
famine  
disease

Pope Gregory I (The Great) called for "EXTRA EFFORT"...seemingly a sports initiative, famed Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi did NOT originate the concept!

The noted RC commentator of 60+ years ago, Msgr Ronald Knox, observed that Septuagesima reminds us that "IT IS NEVER TOO LATE"...a bad news/good news analysis...The Epistle teaches it is never too late to make a mess...to blow it on things temporary. The Gospel teaches it is never too late to get out of a mess...save a situation from seeming waste.

As we consider those lessons we are called to think about our own race. Two questions...WHAT KIND OF PRIZE ARE WE PURSUING...and HOW DO WE FEEL ABOUT OTHERS WHO RECEIVE THE PRIZE?

The Gospel...the PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD is a favorite. I commend it frequently to those who complain that they didn't get their "FAIR SHARE"...it has comprehensive application to those who voice...

- Dislike of newcomers
- Unfair labor practices..."hey what's going on here...?"
- Despair that others receive equal treatment

The main point...God decides...NOT man!

What should we seek? Simply to receive God's promise. Nothing is more important and it is there for the taking. It's vital that we concentrate on what GOD asks of US...not be concerned about how we think he may deal with others...that's his business.

Bottom line...make sound choices and we will receive what we are promised.

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