

October 27, 2019 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

As was mentioned earlier, the day after Halloween is a holy day of obligation, it's All Saints Day and so we have the two Masses, 8:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. to make up for Halloween. Also beginning November 7<sup>th</sup>, we will have services on Thursday. We haven't been having that because of my day off, but I figure, you know Deacon Mike is on injured reserve till about the middle of December and we're getting a new deacon as soon as the new paperwork comes in, Deacon Chuck. So, I have two deacons that I think are going to help me. So, I'll put them to work on Thursday while I sleep in. We will be having services every day at that point so that's a wonderful thing for our parish. In two weeks I will have been here eight years, that's how old the parish is. In all that time, I never thought I would see the day when one of my altar servers is now as tall as me. Anthony and I are both 5' 11". He has made that goal, he's the first one in recorded history, okay. But, if you look at his Mom and Dad, he's not stopping. I have stopped, he's not going to stop. Pretty soon he'll be looking down at me like my younger brother did one summer. My Dad had to go to military school in Biloxi, Mississippi, we were stationed in Williams Air Force Base here. My three younger brothers went away with my parents to Biloxi, Mississippi. They came back three months later, my younger brother was looking me in the eye when he left; when he came back, he was looking down at me. And he liked to do that because he walked up and peered down, he made a point to do that. Don't do that Anthony. You'll see my bald spot.

Today we see a second reading from Saint Paul that's very human, but at the same time rooted in great theology and spirituality, and everyday life. Because Saint Paul is now an old man. He is looking and facing the prospect of death because he's in prison and he's chained up. He is wondering, "Am I going to be able to be innocent or declared guilty?" And of course getting declared guilty will be a death sentence. So he's facing death. In this reading he has a lot of references that are very deep theological references. But it also shows us a positive outlook on death. In our culture in America, we don't think about death. Alan Alda, a couple days ago said, "Who wouldn't want to live to be 200 years old?" I would not, not with this body anyway. But, most people are afraid of death, they're afraid of dying, why? Because they're not Christian, they do not have faith in Jesus. But Saint Paul does, and he gives us a positive outlook on death. Not to be afraid but something to be looked forward to, something to embrace. He says, "I'm being poured out like a libation." We don't do this, we go, "Cheers," and make a toast. But in the pagan world, they would pour out some of their wine before they drank it, as an honor to the gods, not our God, to the gods. Paul was using a reference from the world around him because there were a lot of pagans. And he is saying, I am being poured out like a sacrifice, I'm being poured out like a gift to God, because I'm about to end my life. And he said, "The time of my departure is at hand." I like the old translation, when I was growing up, it said, "The time of my dissolution is near." Because of course, Star Trek was on then and the transporter beam dissolved you, dissolutioned you, like in little particles. But departure comes from this Greek word that has three connotations. The first connotation is, *The loosening of the rope of the animal*. You untie the animal like in the old cowboy movies, they come and tie it to the hitching rack (post), you're going to loosen that and you're going to walk the animal free. Saint Paul is saying, "My captivity here is going to end, pretty soon I'm going to be free to walk away." It also means, *loosening the ropes of a tent*, so you can pack it up and move on. Paul was a tent maker by trade, that's how he earned his money to go around the Mediterranean region and preach. So that's a very apropos meaning for him. So he says, *I'm loosening the tent ropes*. But it also means, *loosening the ropes that hold the ship to the pier*, so the ship can travel on a journey, over the

horizon it disappears here and reappears somewhere else. All of these are metaphors and examples of, "I am going to go on a journey. I am being freed from this life and I'm going to go on a new journey." A journey that he's looking forward to.

Then we see, Paul is a sports fan. He starts using sports language. We look at Paul, Paul was born in Tarsus, modern day Turkey. It's at the end of the Greek empire and beginning of the Roman empire, they overlap. But both of these empires have one thing in common, they love professional sports. They have something very much in common with Americans today. Love of American sports. Who are the highest paid people in our society besides CEO's? Sports figures, tremendous salaries. I'll step aside and say my pet peeve is baseball players. They stand out there in the field with their glove doing nothing and getting millions of dollars. Ah I don't know, anyway, back over here. So Paul is saying, "I have competed well." He is talking about the sports language but he's also saying that being a Christian is a competition. You have to compete with the other voices, with the other, "religions," that are out there, the other points of view. You have to compete with them and, "I have competed well and stayed true," he says, "to the faith of Jesus Christ." He said, "I have finished the race." That's a very good one. How many tombstones I have seen in cemeteries that say, "I have finished the race." "I have completed the race." That's not what mines going to say, but, "I have finished the race." So he's still in this sports theme, very much a sports guy. And he says, "I have kept the faith." Now you and I think faith means, religion, but in Paul's time the word for faith had another couple of meanings. A sports figure would take an oath of faith and he would say, "I am prepared to the best of my ability, and I will not cheat." I will not run my chariots wheels into another player's wheels, etc. etc. So Paul is saying, "I have been faithful to the oath that I took. But it also has a business meaning. "I have been faithful to the contract; I haven't breached the contract." But for a Jew who knows the relationship between himself and God, it's not a contract, it's a covenant. What's the difference? One person does something wrong, you break the contract. A covenant says, whoever breaks it, forgive them and move on and keep the covenant. That's what God does with us. So Paul is saying, "I have been true to the covenant with God." That God made with my people. and he's also saying, "I have been prepared and I did not cheat, I did not go off the beaten path of Christianity." He said, "I have kept the faith." He says, "I have received the crown of righteousness." We all want to get a crown when we get to heaven, we're royal, we're children of God, God the Father. So, royalty, we all want a crown. At the time of Paul, you had the Olympics going on. That was the big sports event. And what happened to the winner in the Olympic games for each sport? There was no first, second, third place, there was only first place and that person received a crown of laurel leaves. That person had like a free year's subscription to something or they got free food for a year, or if you were a slave you got your freedom. Now this is interesting because Saint Paul is always saying, "I am a slave to Christ." Now Saint Paul is saying, "I will receive a crown, and I will be free of slavery, and I will be a child of God." He says, "I will receive the crown of righteousness." Think of all these things that he's talking about in relationship to us. Do we think of our death like that? Do we think of the next life like that? Are we happy to think that we're going to die? That's why we were born. Or, do we fear that? Think about it. So he says, "the Lord has given me the crown of righteousness, the crown not just of laurel leaves, but that I will be made right in the sight of God." "Right now," he says, "On this earth, I'm not right in the sight of God, but I'll be right with God when I die, because I have kept the faith, because I have completed the race, because I have been true to my oath." And then he goes on in the second paragraph, he says, "My first defense." (Paul went through two trials, the first one was in Palestine with Festus and Festus said, "Well I don't know what to do with you so I'm going to send you to Rome

because you are a Roman citizen.”) Paul waited two years in prison before he got to see the emperor to have his second trial. He says, “In my first trial, no one came to my defense but the Lord stood by me.” Now, there’s a reason no one came to his defense. In those days, if you were a witness to a person’s character and that person was convicted, you went to prison too, as a witness because you lied. So people were afraid to be witnesses. He says, “I don’t hold it against them.” That’s why he doesn’t hold it against them. But he said, “The Lord Jesus stood by me.” Many people today, in our very technological society, do not think that there’s anyone with them. They think they’re all alone; no one will understand me. Suicide is ramped among all groups of people in our society, especially those most technologically plugged in. They’ll say, “I have 1400 Facebook friends, but one of them starts bullying them on-line, they want to commit suicide because they’ve never met these people. Paul says, “The Lord stood by me.” The Lord stands by us, each one of us, and He wants us to be able to finish the race. He wants us not to be afraid of life or death, because He’s there with us. He wants us to know that there’s always somebody that understands. Saint Paul says, “Look at death a different way.” If you’re afraid of death, why? Is it because you need to go to confession? Is it because you need to get right with God? Then start out with doing what this tax collector did in our gospel reading. “oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” And then get yourself to confession. Is it another reason? Then try and solve that. But, look at death like Saint Paul did; not the end of life, the end of a race, the end of a tournament, but not the end of life, because it’s only the beginning. The reason that all the Christians throughout the ages have been able to face their martyrdom is because they knew it wasn’t the end. Our society says, “Oh, it’s the end.” And it’s not. We have to remember that because Saint Paul says, “It’s not the end; it’s a new voyage, the animal is wandering away to a new land, the ship is sailing away over a new horizon.” It’s just a different way of being, so don’t be afraid and each and every day remember the mercy of God.

God bless you.