

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

I think it would be a good idea to start this Sunday with the reading from St. Paul's first letter to Timothy.

If we do that it gives is a good perspective for what's at stake in today Gospel passage.

One of the images that Paul prefers to use when talking about the Christian life is that of running a race.

Running a race is different than going for a jog. There's a striving that goes into race running and Paul sees that striving as an essential part of our Christian spirituality.

When Paul encourages us to "pursue" righteousness, etc., implied in that is the belief that those virtues are never things we've mastered, but always things that can be further developed.

This process lasts a lifetime.

The opposite of striving—at least in the context of practicing the virtues—could very well be complacency.

The complacent person has lost his growing edge. He's no longer putting forth the effort. In a common turn of phrase, you could say "he's phoning it in."

Can you imagine someone like LeBron James or Kevin Durant coasting through a basketball game? People would pick up on that right away.

In the gospel we have the story of a person who has lost that sense of striving for the life of virtue. He's taking it easy, he's enjoying life without a care about the world around him.

He doesn't even take note of it anymore. Complacency has blinded him to the needs of others, or even their very existence.

That works until he passes over from this life into what awaits beyond the grave.

Then everything gets reversed and he is the one in need.

Striving after a life of virtue would have protected him from all that.

Actually, striving after the virtues may not be that familiar a concept for us.

What are the virtues, anyway?

We can probably name a few: patience is a virtue, right? Charity, too.

What are the others?

First in Paul's list is righteousness, which could also call justice carried out with humility.

Then, he lists devotion, which is often connected to a sense of awe in the realization of God's majesty.

Then comes faith, which does not refer so much to the doctrines we hold to as

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it does to a way of life so trusting in God that our constant goal is to follow God's will, to really strive for that.

That will inevitably lead us to love. Christian love is seen in its effects: it brings out the good of others, whether they are friends, enemies, or somewhere in between.

Almost as a way of concretizing the expressions of love, Paul calls Timothy and us to take on attitudes that show reverence to others: patience and gentleness.

These two go together as one will help us grow in the other and teach us to respect those who are different from ourselves even as we give ourselves room to grow.

The great thing about virtues is that growth in one will lead us to growth in the others.

We may have already identified one of the virtues that we could do better at. If we strive to grow in it, we will find that we have made progress in the others as well.

But striving is key. We can't afford to be complacent, to give up and take the attitude "this is about as good as I'm ever going to get."

That would be a denial of the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit who lives

within us and does not rest until we are united with God.

We have a great resource here at St. Ben's for spurring us on to the practice of the virtues. Surely you've noticed that the virtues are written on the walls of the church.

They are put there to help us remember to keep working at them—all of them all together so that we can be witnesses to the life of the world to come even in this life.

As another old saying goes, "The life of virtue is its own reward."