Septu(2024)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

 Today we are really commemorating two matters. First, the kickoff of the pre-Lenten warm-up season of *gesimatide* which has been dropped from modern calendars, and remembering King Charles I, the martyr.

 Before moving into our Epistle for *Septuagesima* I thought we should look at why Charles I is the on the Anglican calendar. In short because he died for the Catholic faith. Upon becoming King of England on *Candlemas* in 1626 Charles Stuart worked tirelessly to exalt the Sacraments and priesthood, which the Calvinists had denied in their Civil War for a Constitutional Monarchy in the wake of Henry the Eighth and the Reformation.

But when he tried to impose liturgical worship in Scotland, Charles got into trouble. Eventually he was condemned to death by Parliament, and indignities began.

 Charles went to his execution calmly accepting it as a mercy from God for his **own** sins. So on January 30th 1649 after having said the Morning Office and receiving Last Rites and listening *St. Matthew’s Passion* he went to be beheaded. He was greeted a moan from the crowd, some of whom dipped their handkerchiefs in his blood.

The *Earl of Clarendon* who knew him well wrote of Charles that: he was the worthiest gentleman, the best master, the best husband, the best father , and the best Christian of that age. While the Puritans allowed him to be buried in St. George’s chapel at Windsor Castle they denied him funeral rites.

 Interestingly, King Charles seems to be the lone person the Church of England has tried to make into a saint since the Reformation. Thomas More and John Fischer, the lone bishop to oppose Henry the Eight with More, were not canonized by Rome until 1935. This huge delay of almost 400 years no doubt reflects the fact that there were not a lot of Catholics in renegade Protestant England to push the polite matter with Catholic Rome.

 Similarly, it would seem that the fact that King Charles is not on the Roman calendar despite having been martyred for his Catholic faith reflects political “sensibilities” since he WAS a monarch of England. One might remember that when Pope Benedict paid a State visit to Britain in 2010 that his official meeting with Queen Elizabeth took place not in England where she was also head of the Established Church, but in Scotland where she was simply monarch.

So, King Charles justly deserves to be on our calendar of saints. It is good to commemorate any person who, besides having to bear an earthly crown, won the **crown** of martyrdom.

*"Now they do it to obtain a corruptible* ***crown****; but we an incorruptible."*

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 Whenever this Epistle is read I end up thinking about the Olympics. We have the Summer Games this year. But I especially enjoy the Winter Games which gives one a chance to see sports not normally on TV in America since the days of *ABC’s Wide World of Sports*.

It is one of the few times one can witness on TV, without additional charges, ski-jumping or biathlon, to say nothing of luge. While I have not yet warmed much to curling, after 12 Winter Olympics with Anneliese I have come to enjoy figure skating and ice-dancing, along with of course hockey.

 Nowadays Olympic athletes are competing, besides for commercial endorsements, for medals: gold, silver or bronze, which will increase their endorsements. These medals have no regular size and have varied greatly over time. The silver medal really is indeed mostly silver (92.5%). The gold is the same as silver except for six grams of gilt covering (about 2 oz.) The bronze one, well, let's just say third place finishers take home a medal with metallic value of about $3. They effectively take home **copper**.

 In the ancient games, however, competitors very much did compete for a crown which would wither or "corrupt" as St. Paul stated. In the games at Mt. Olympus, the Olympic games, only the winner received an award: an olive laurel wreath.

 St. Paul was writing, however, to the church in Corinth. This wealthy city, along with two others in the Empire, also hosted similar games. In Corinth theirs were the "Isthmian [Is-mith-ian]games". They were held in the Spring every **other** year. There were two other Pan-Hellenic games, the Pythian [Pith-ian]and Nemean [Neh-me-an]. At least one occurred each year. The Olympics were the most prestigious of them all.

 The Isthmian games' name recognized the commercial value to Corinth from its isthmus between the Aegean and Ionian seas. Hauling ships across the narrow isthmus instead of sailing all around the peninsula saved many days and avoided storms and wrecks.

 Corinth's wealth had enabled its citizenry to engage in all sorts of other pursuits of the “passions”, intellectual and "otherwise". One might have nicknamed it: "Vegas by the Sea".

 Now both the Olympic and Isthmian games were not so much sport "*ludo gratia ludis"* (sport for the sake of sport). Probably to the chagrin of many today involved with the Modern Games, these events actually were **religious** festivals honoring the gods and seeking their goodwill to the area to continue.

 Whether running, boxing, jumping, weight lifting, the one meeting the still used ancient motto of being either *citius, altius,* or *fortius,* (fastest, highest, strongest) at these games won a crown of either parsley or pine cones. While pine cones would last longer than parsley or olive leaves, all still would deteriorate or corrupt over days, weeks or months.

 Just as today, competitors back then did not "just show up" half intoxicated as if they were at a summer village festival, but went into training. One did not want a god or two to be offended that you had not taken your opportunity to **shine** in his eyes seriously. Besides physical training, competitors would abstain from eating too much, from alcohol, and sexual relations.

 These ancient competitors did all this for weeks to obtain a prize which would fade, but which showed they had found favor in the gods' eyes.

St. Paul is making the point here to the Corinthians and us too.

In short, it is that if pagans who lived in "the real world" did all this training or keeping of their bodies "in subjection" to please a **false** god and win something long gone before ones death, why can't we make the same effort to win from the **real** God a prize which will last for eternity after death?

 It is a tough question. Do we put more energy and time into the things of men which will pass away than in trying to make God smile and win a prize which does not fade?

 I believe we all know that in truth neither Mardi Gras, the World Cup, or the Super Bowl (even when your team wins) really does not warrant more time and effort than becoming all that one **can be** as a Christian? No doubt if we knew someone who had "what it takes" to be an **Olympian** and instead just did drugs or lived on donuts and cigarettes, we would not find him or her admirable.

 What should be the judgment by God of a Christian who surrounded by opportunities to grow spiritually, without even fear today of bodily punishment, doesn't act like a partisan of Christ? It has been reported that Mahatma Gandhi once explored becoming a Christian in India, but, tragically, found those in church there (which almost certainly would have been Anglican) so disinterested in "otherworldliness" that he decided there was nothing to the faith.

 And so, the time is approaching to show ourselves admirable to the Lord. Today's lesson then is indeed a perfect passage to "warm us up", to prepare us for: the **preparation** of Lent before the BIG event of Easter. Amen. +