

Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

Theme: Looking forward

Goal: To give the assurance that looking to Jesus we will win the race.

Dear Brothers and dear Sister in Christ:

Introd.:

What memories do you have from the time when you were learning to ride a bike? In my case, I fell down many times because I was looking down to the bike's wheel. So my older brother said to me: "You have to look forward, you have to look ahead, you have to fix your eyes to where you want to go; do not worry about the tire!" I tried and it worked! But then I decided to look behind me to see if my brother was still there holding me as he used to do; and he was not there; and I became scared and fell down again. I had already ridden a good distance alone, but my fear and lack of attention made me fall down.

In a book written by Dr. Hermann Gockel ("Ergue a tua vida"), there is a story that I like very much: A group of boys made a bet to see who could walk in a straight line over a field covered by snow. Each one tried, but no one could do it. The line was not straight. It was like a zigzag. Most of the boys were looking down to their feet, trying to put one foot in front of the other, and there were no results. Finally, the youngest boy made a true, straight line! Answering the other boys about how he did that, he said: "Can you see the tower of that church? That is the direction of my home. My mother told me that if one day I am lost in the city, I should walk toward that cross this way I would get straight home. So I looked at that cross over the tower and kept on walking ..."

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (Hebrews 12:2)

As we are beginning a new year, and as I am beginning my ministry among you, this is one of my favorite texts, and it shall serve as a guideline as we are walking together toward the goal God puts in front of us as St. Thomas Congregation and as individuals.

I – The witnesses of the Old Testament

Chapter eleven of Hebrews, coming immediately before our text, is known as the chapter of the people that became heroes by their faith. It shows us those who lived before Christ, in the Old Testament period and used to walk over the world looking forward, looking to God's promises, fixed on the Messiah who was to come. Despite the many conflicts and temptations in their lives, these heroes did not lose their final goal. They passed over the difficulties because of their faith in God's promises. In this faith they were saved.

This shows how important it is for us to read and to know the Old Testament, not only as mere history, but as part of the salvation history. It shows how God saved His people of the Old Testament through their faith in the Messiah/Jesus who would come. It makes us confident that God's love comes to us nowadays too, to save us, and to lead us to the right way in our lives, as He did with the faithful of the Old Testament, looking to us.

II – What can put us out of the way?

We know that sometimes it is not easy to walk in this faith's way. Even the ones that are determined to do so have difficulties. There are many situations which tempt us to look out of the way, making us run the risk of getting lost and never attaining our purpose, (God's purpose for our life!!!) **“Let us throw off everything that hinders and run with perseverance”** say the words of our text.

Reading about the Olympic Games of Ancient Greeks (where they really venerated the body) I read that the runners used to wear just a small loincloth (CLOTH – th is like in thank you) because the clothes (CLOUDZ) might hinder them while running. One of the

runners, trying to win, took off his small loincloth and arrived at the end with no clothes, naked. He won the race! A new tradition was created – from that time on the runners used to run without clothes, nothing to hinder them, as we see in some ancient pictures.

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.”

An old teacher of mine told us during class: God had washed all our sins when we were baptized; but while we are walking around the world, the dirt of the sin still sticks to our feet and to our clothes. So we have to wash daily.

The old teacher was talking about the daily repentance we have to seek every day in Jesus, as a daily renewal of our baptism, as Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer. We can not permit that the dirt turns to a crust over us, hindering our run. A runner cannot run with the feet full of mud...

Troubles and concerns about money, work and health also hinder the race of our life. It makes us see only our troubles, and the troubles of the people around us. The Bible text says: **“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”** Once and again we have to confirm our faith in Jesus and fix our eyes on the crucified Christ, resurrected to bring new life and show us God’s way.

III – Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

The story of Peter walking over the water shows us very well what it means to fix our eyes on Jesus with faith, and what the result is if we turn our eyes off him. If we get scared of the waves of our life and with the power of the wind, we will sink. But while we have our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can even walk over the water! This means:

wonderful things can happen in our lives, wonderful things that we could never imagine! And in our powerless moments, when we see the power of the wind and water and become desperate, Jesus reaches out His hands to help us. He always comes in His Word and in the Sacraments. This is faith! This is fixing our eyes on Jesus. This is to have an aim, a purpose in our lives!

Conclusion

The race of our life is longer than a marathon. But Christ runs before us and takes off all that could hinder us – the sins, the devil, even the death! In His resurrection, He showed that He is the Victor! He opened the gate of the heaven for us, giving us his victory through his resurrection. He is sitting beside the Father, looking for us during our race in 2011 and in the years to come, taking care of us, and giving us the strength necessary to have perseverance: His word of encouragement in the Bible, His heavenly food, His Body and Blood in the Sacrament. Let us fix our eyes on nothing else but Jesus! He is the Author of our faith in our Baptism, and he is the Perfecter of our faith during the race. Because of what Jesus has done and is doing for us, we will one day be able to say by His grace what the Apostle Paul said, **“I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crow of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day”** (2 Tim. 4.7-8).
Amen

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