



Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,

I remember going to the 2016 World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland with the members of the Diocese of Venice. It was a very warm time in July filled with the presence of the youth from different continents and countries praying together with Pope Francis. And I remember in one of the prayer vigils Pope Francis mentioned that many enjoy soccer. This brought cheers. Then he referred to the coming World Cup. Even louder cheers. Finally, he said that Jesus is a "greater prize than the World Cup!" Young people stood, raised their hands and gave a sustained cheer.

Jesus is the one great prize. That's what we see in today's readings. In comparison to Jesus everything in this world is vanity. Only Jesus has ultimate worth - and only in him does anything have value. Apart from him all is emptiness, vanity.

The Pope encouraged young people to give themselves to Jesus, to not let fear hold them back. He spoke about a Brazilian Saint, Blessed Jose de Anchieta. In spite of poor health, he began evangelizing at the age of 19. His example really struck me. I was upset by some of the inconveniences while attending World Youth Day - long waits, standing in the rain with a queasy stomach - but then I heard about Blessed Jose. Before he even got started, he suffered a shipwreck off the coast of Brazil! He continued on, learned the peoples' language, lived with them - and made hundreds of converts to Jesus.

Besides Blessed Jose de Anchieta I would like to tell you about another young man who gave himself totally to Jesus. His commitment will help us understand today's second reading. His name was Eric Liddell - the young Scotsman featured in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*. In his late teens he joined a couple of other young men in embracing the Four Absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Love.

This is what St. Paul tells us, Absolute Honesty, "Stop lying to one another." How beautiful our lives would be if we could be completely open to each other. To do that, St. Paul tells us, we need to become new people in Christ. Put to death those parts of you that are "earthly: impurity...evil desires and greed," which as St. Paul says, "is idolatry."

Greed is idolatry because we make gods out of our possessions. I can start to think that I am somebody because I have a nice home, the latest computer, money on my credit card. But as Jesus reminds us, those things are ultimately empty. Tonight, God could demand my life. My possessions - the things I worked hard for - will not matter. They will go to someone else who might not even appreciate them.

We all know "you can't take it with you." But there is a paradox: What we give away, we do take with us. C.S. Lewis went further, "Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours... The only things we can keep are the things we freely give to God." As Jesus tells us: instead of storing up things in this world, we need to become "rich in what matters to God."

Your life could end tonight. No suffering will last forever, nor will any pleasure. Only eternity will go on forever. Where we spend eternity depends on our relationship with Jesus, now. Only one thing matters - Am I giving myself to Jesus? Becoming a new person in him? He is the great prize, the only prize. In Jesus we become rich in what matters to God. "If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father."

Have a Blessed 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time!

Rev. Rafal Ligenza

Pastor — St. Joseph Parish