

Friday, August 12, 2011 – Gathering with Permanent Deacons and Spouses  
Homily for Evening Prayer

Have you ever read the short scripture passage in morning or evening prayer and wonder what kind of insight or inspiration is to be found there? At the same time, it can be a bit of a challenge when the content of the reading doesn't seem to speak about the circumstances of our lives; at least not in an apparent way.

Today's scripture reading from St. James is a good example. However, there is a specific point of emphasis that is found in this reading. Maybe an illustration will help us to reflect on it and its significance for us at this time.

I read a story once about a college athlete who was a fairly consistent winner at cross country races. During an interview about his success in that sport, the reporter asked if he enjoyed running.

This athlete surprisingly said, "NO!" and then offered an explanation.

He started cross country running reluctantly in high school. His physical education teacher noticed that he was fast and had a natural gait when the students would run laps around the outdoor track of the school.

When he was in high school, this athlete could not understand how the other runners did it: they would run, and run, and run, and cross the finish line every time.

At that time he constantly felt like he was dying and found himself giving up a mile before the end of the course.

His high school coach explained: great runners understand that their will would give out long before their bodies (before their physical strength), but they could persevere and complete the course if they committed themselves to something beyond their own will.

The lesson learned by this athlete: The contest of running a cross country race was not simply a matter of physical strength, but one of will.

St. James tells us today, "Let endurance come to its perfection."

The question for us is, how do we do that?

St. James gives us two ideas to help us formulate a response to the question: How do we let endurance come to its perfection?

- Count trials (challenges of life) as a pure joy
- Realize that when your faith is tested it makes for endurance

In other words, like the successful cross country runners, we need to commit ourselves to something beyond our own will.

Our model is Jesus Christ, who committed himself to something beyond his will.

Even though Jesus is truly God, he committed himself to the will of the Father. We see this in several of his experiences in the Gospels:

- the finding in the Temple as a youth; “Don’t you know that I must be about my Father’s business?”
- temptation during 40 days in the desert; he would not commit to what Satan proposed because he was already committed to the Father
- in various miracles; Jesus would often give praise and thanks to the Father before feeding a crowd of people or healing the sick, etc.
- agony in the garden; Jesus’ prayed to the Father asking to be relieved of having to suffer and die on the cross, but in the end he said to his Father, “Your will be done.”
- during the crucifixion, Jesus continued to pray to the Father; “Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing,” or “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

The lesson to be learned by us

- we are to use the resources/talents/strengths/abilities that we have
- but our endurance (or perseverance/faithfulness) is not simply a matter of our own strength
- our endurance is a matter of will; of our will conformed to the will of the Father

It's worth noting that in this very brief Scripture reading today for evening prayer

- St. James admits that it will be a struggle
- St. James tells us that it should be counted as a pure joy (and we all know that joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit)
- St. James reminds us that by admitting all this when we are tested, it makes for endurance (and the one who was ultimately tested and was able to persevere and is a model of endurance for us is Christ)

In an ordination homily in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI said:

- in addition to graciously accepting the gift of life that comes from God, we must learn to give away our life each day
  - through service to others
  - by keeping ourselves available for whatever the Lord needs of us at any moment
- by being available and useful this way, our life becomes important, meaningful, and beautiful

As deacons, you have been ordained for ministry of service

As spouses of deacons, you have committed yourselves to support that ministry of service

The word of God in today's evening prayer reminds you

- of the need for endurance (perseverance/faithfulness)
- this endurance is to be counted as a joy
- that it is certainly viewed as a joy in God's eyes

The lesson to be learned by us today is this:

- we must all seek to know and to do the will of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
- God will sustain us with joy
- God will never be tired in offering his strength and support

It's not about our will; its about the will of the Father.