

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Junior High Youth Day
Bishop Carroll High School, Ebensburg, PA
March 17, 2013

Good Afternoon Junior High Youth!

Where are all the 8th graders? Let's hear it 8th graders!
Where are all the 7th graders? Let's hear it 7th graders!
Where are all the 6th graders? Let's hear it 6th graders!

I am so happy to see all of you today and to celebrate this Mass with you. Wasn't that an awesome time we just had for confessions. Let's hear it for the sacrament of Reconciliation!

I know that you have been listening to a lot of talks today and maybe your ears are getting a little sore. But I want to talk to you about something God is trying to tell us in the Scripture readings today. In order to do that, I want to tell you a story.

Kyle was in junior high school. One day his coach told Kyle that there was a 5K race in another town approximately 30 miles away. Kyle student was an excellent runner and the coach thought he had a good chance of winning, so the coach already registered him for the race.

He told Kyle to ask his parents to bring him to race on Saturday. And tell them that he had a good chance at a \$100 prize for the winner.

Kyle was really excited. He loved to run and he thought it would be awesome to win \$100! The coach explained to Kyle how to get to the race. It was supposed to start in the parking lot of a store in that town. He was supposed to be there 30 minutes before the race to sign in.

On Saturday morning, Kyle did not get out of bed on time. His dad kept telling him to get moving or they would be late for the race. When they got in the car, his father asked Kyle for the directions. Kyle told his dad that he didn't write them down, but it would be pretty easy to find on the main road in that town.

The truth is, Kyle could not remember the directions the coach gave him. He was too busy listening to the coach telling him about the \$100 dollar prize.

When they arrived at the town 30 miles away, Kyle's father saw a parking lot with lots of people that looked like they were gathering for a race. So he parked the car and walked over to the registration table with Kyle.

They couldn't find Kyle's name on the list. He couldn't understand why because his coach said that he sent in the registration. They took Kyle's name and since his father was there he gave permission for Kyle to be in the 5K race.

Kyle got a number that was pinned on his back. His father wished him success and told him that he would meet up with him at the finish line. Since Kyle was a little late, there were a lot of runners lined up ahead of him. But when the race started, it didn't take Kyle very long to get out to the front.

As he got close to the finish line, Kyle and two other runners were in the lead. He knew he had to push hard to win so he waited for the right moment and then put on some extra speed. Kyle got ahead of them and they never caught up.

When Kyle crossed the finish line, lots of people cheered, including his father. When he found somebody in charge, Kyle asked where he should collect the \$100 prize money. The man told him there was no prize money. This was a charity race where all the runners had sponsors and the money they collected was going to pay for sports equipment at the local youth center.

Kyle explained to the man that his coach said that this race had a \$100 prize. That's when the man told Kyle that he heard about a race with a \$100 prize, but that race was in a town 30 miles in the other direction.

Kyle was a winner that day but he wasn't a winner. Do you know what I mean?

Most of us here would rather be a winner than a loser, right? But at your age in junior high, a lot of people and a lot of ideas can tempt you not to be a winner.

Did you ever think about the difference between being a winner and a loser? I found a bunch of sayings about that difference. Here are just a few of them:

- A winner respects elders and superiors and tries to learn from them; a loser ignores or resents elders and superiors.
- A winner listens to his others; a loser just waits until it's his turn to talk.
- A winner works hard and has more time; a loser is always "too busy" to do what is necessary.
- A winner makes a mistake and says, "I was wrong"; a loser makes a mistake, and says, "It wasn't my fault," and sometimes blames others.
- A winner tries again; a loser says, "Who cares?" and then quits.
- A winner tries to do the best and is thankful for the results; a loser complains when the prize isn't good enough.

In the second reading today, we hear from St. Paul. He is a winner who speaks to us about being a winner. St. Paul gives us his best ideas about what it means for us to be winners because we are also followers of Jesus Christ.

- St. Paul reminds us that the most important thing is to forget the past and keep our eyes focused on what is ahead. That's like having received the sacrament of Reconciliation today. What you said in your confession should now be in the past. You should focus on what is ahead in doing what is good.
- St. Paul tells us that we should push on toward our goal and our prize. He says that our prize is God's upward calling in Jesus Christ. What he means is, all of the ideas you heard and talked about today that has to do with your faith; that's what you need to focus on. And don't forget, Jesus wants more from you so that he can give you more.
- St. Paul tells us that everything else is not important. The most important thing for us is to know Jesus Christ our Lord. He is our first prize.

Isaiah the prophet gives us the same kind of advice in the first reading today. Isaiah tells us that we should not focus on the past. We need to focus on what is coming to us in the future.

What he is talking about is that our life should always be directed toward God who loves us and wants to show us his mercy and love as he did to the woman in today's Gospel story.

Isaiah says that God wants to do something new for us. And he promises that if we trust in God and follow his directions, we will receive the most important prize, the gift of sharing God's life now and forever in heaven.

In this Eucharist we receive God's promise that we will be rewarded. He gives us the Body and Blood of Jesus which gives us the strength, the energy, and the focus that we need to stay on the right path during the race.

How many here want to be winners?! How many here want to be winners with Jesus?! Awesome! Think of all the prizes that you have received here at Junior High Youth Day; the fun, the laughs, new friends, great ideas about how to know your faith and live your faith.

Keep that faith alive. Keep that faith strong. Keep your focus on Jesus Christ. Be a winner with Jesus. Don't ever listen to anyone who tells you to go in a different direction. If you follow another direction, I can guarantee that there will be no reward. Your reward is in Jesus Christ.

Do you know why you can find your reward, your prize? You can always find it because as you have been talking about today, "I can do all things..."

I am very proud of all of you young people for being here today. You are awesome!