VII Trinity 2016
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
The Collect   Romans 6.19

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Grace is God's free gift that helps us say and do the right things. The Collect reminds us God gives us all good things...he is not capable of giving us bad things. God wants us to receive, enjoy and employ his grace...reception is a call to action!

We cannot earn or buy God's grace...he gives it to us freely. We experience God's grace in Word and Sacrament...Sacrament and Word. God's most perfect example of his grace and love toward us was the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross...the price he was willing to pay to free us from sin and death...and open to us the possibility of life everlasting in heaven.

God's ultimate act of forgiveness came with a price. It cost God his Son...it cost Jesus his life...and it costs us. By definition a gift is free and comes without any conditions. If grace is God's free gift...what is the cost to us?

If God is the giver of all good things, we want to use his gifts wisely and correctly. In the Collect we ask God to implant in our hearts the love of his Name and to give us his grace to always do the right thing.

We don't like to talk about sin. The greatest of Satan's lies is to try to get us to think sin doesn't exist and we don't need God's grace and we can get along fine on our own. We can fool ourselves into thinking because Jesus died for our sins...we don't have to worry about being good or bad...we can live our lives any way we want because sin doesn't matter...no need for change...after all isn't everyone going to heaven anyway. Time for a reality check!

Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer talks compellingly about Grace and Forgiveness in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. Accepting God's forgiveness, writes Pastor Bonhoeffer, without making any effort to change is nothing more than "cheap grace". *"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."*

The cost of being a follower of Jesus is our willingness to make changes in our lives by tapping into God's abundant and freely given grace...grace that gives us new life in Jesus...grace that helps us overcome obstacles...specific sins...that get in our way and keep us from loving God and others as we should and from leading lives pleasing to God.

Saint Paul had to confront corrupt teaching in the Church from some people who said because we are baptized into new life in Jesus and have God's grace...sin no longer matters and has no consequences. We can do as we please. Paul counters this dangerous argument by saying living a sinful life is like being a slave without any freedom. Baptism is not an "act out" permit.

Slavery is a topic that makes us uncomfortable and it should...human trafficking and slavery still exist today. Slaves have no control over their lives. By being a slave to sin, Paul means sin controls our lives and prevents us from having a right relationship with God. Sin make us slaves to death…and that is not what God wants for us...he wants us to enjoy the freedom to say and do the right things...always.

It is entirely possible for us to fully enjoy God's forgiveness and grace when we admit to ourselves we need his forgiveness and grace. We must then make a concerted effort to make changes in our lives. For us this is the cost of doing God's work...what Pastor Bonheoffer calls "costly grace". God knows what is best for us...let his grace go to work in our lives and change them for the better.

Grace is little comprehended...think "gracious"...the antithesis of demanding. We experience God's grace in many ways. Our job during this lifetime is to use our free will to avoid those things that keep distracting us and ask God to give us his grace to help us.

God's grace is free...we just have to ask for it…and do our very best to follow through in our commitment...our action plan...to say and do the right things.

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