

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR “A”

These past few months have yielded many gorgeous days for golf. On one of those days I was blessed to be on a beautiful course with a great group of guys. It happened that one of the gentlemen in my foursome was clearly struggling, particularly with driving the ball off of the tee. He would approach the tee box, tee it up and swing – only to have his ball hook. He just couldn't hit it straight. As we proceeded through the round, this golfer became more frustrated. What was interesting was not his swing but his attitude. With every hook he would keep saying, “I can't hit the ball.” After repeated, “I can't's”, I said, “Perhaps the problem is not in your swing, but in your head. For as long as you keep telling yourself you can't, you won't.”

So much of golf – and life for that matter is mental. That is to say, what we do or don't do – is very much connected to what we think and or feel. In other words, it's all about attitude.

That is essentially what St. Paul has been saying to us during the past few weeks in his Letter to the Philippians. On Sept. 18th. – St. Paul Stated, “For to me life is Christ, and death is gain.” On Sept. 25th – St. Paul said, “Your attitude must be Christ.” Such an attitude required that we “humbly regard others as more important” than ourselves. Last week you might recall St. Paul said, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” Suffice to say, an attitude of prayer can help diminish anxiety.

Today, we hear from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, one last time, and once again – it is all about attitude. He writes, “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” Whether he is living in abundance or scarcity, St. Paul believes he can do it. Notice there is no such word as “can't” in his vocabulary. This confident belief is rooted not only in Paul's trust that we as human beings derive our strength from God, but also in the understanding that God will give us what we need. That is why he can say to the Philippians, “My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

While God supplies us with what we need, it goes without saying that we do not always get what we want. And when we do not get what we want – our attitude inevitably is affected. And yet – life is first and foremost about needs as opposed to wants.

You know in my previous assignment as Rector of the Seminary and Director of Vocations, former Pittsburgh Steeler and now Houston Texas tight end, Mark Bruener accompanied me to many Catholic High Schools in the Diocese to share his faith and help promote vocations. One of the things he disclosed in his talk was the shared belief among ex-team athletes in St. Paul's statement, “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.”

My brothers and sisters, whether it's golf, football, work or family life, an attitude is critical. And when that attitude is rooted in Christ, all things are possible. St. Paul was able to withstand the rigors of prison because he believed in Christ and was able to say again and again, “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” Can we say that? Repeat after me. Again. Again.

Whatever our situation, illness, grief, a troubled relationship, financial distress, unpleasant job, depression – we need to trust. “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” The abbreviated version of this is “I can, I can, I can.”

The Gospel for today suggests that there is a dress code for the wedding banquet of heaven. And God help the person who is not wearing the appropriate garment. As we continue with the dress rehearsal here on earth, we need to be more conscious of what we wear – figuratively and literally. You know there is an old expression, “Of all the things we wear our expression is the most important.” What expression are we wearing here? What will we wear this week? Hopefully it is a positive face of can and not of disappointed face of cannot. And in the transparency of this happy face and faith-filled face the whole world will see the words we live by – “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.”