

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 24, 2004

Sirach 35:15-27; Psalm 34; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14
Preaching by: Sister Rose Marie Hennessy

When I get to the “heavenly kingdom” that Paul speaks of there are many I look forward to greeting and meeting. Paul is one of those “first meetings” I hope to experience. He has so many human characteristics that are revealed through the New Testament. These characteristics give us all hope that someone who so readily expresses disappointment, the need for friendship, irascibility, loyalty, and judgment can also have such a deep commitment to “live in Christ”! It’s the Paul of darkness and the Paul of deep faith whose life and faith speak to us today.

The letters Paul writes to his friend Timothy are the most personal of Paul’s writings. He shares with his listeners, and eventually us, through Scripture personal touches, names of people, fellow workers, friends, opponents. I think, and scholars affirm, that at this time of Paul’s writing he was nearing death and as with us, as the years go on, these friends, colleagues, and even “past” enemies take on new life in our memories, a life that is more appreciative.

The selection of Timothy’s letter we heard today and the section left out of today but proclaimed last Monday all give witness to Paul’s need for human supports and confidence that even in the absence of these supports Paul could and did rely on God for strength. The letter was written between trials. Paul had given his all and used the phrase that has become common: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Watching the Olympics this summer, and seeing the garlands placed on the athletes calls Paul and his words to mind. Garlands are used to signify those who “won the race” and also are used in Christian art to signify martyrs. Paul earned a garland.

He also experienced being deserted “... no one came to my support, but all deserted me...” Successes as well as failures, friends as well as deserters, responders as well as opponents all take their places and particular roles in our lives. Even as we are “running the race” and our lives are being poured out as libation there is one source of constant strength. The Lord is standing by us. Standing waiting for us. Standing waiting for our appreciative “embrace”. Standing waiting for recognition! It is through this strength of the Lord and with this strength of the Lord that we can continue to “run the race and be able to keep the faith”!