

Father O'Connor's Homily for 17 August 2025
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10

Hebrews 12: 1-4

Luke 12: 49-53

“Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us, and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” [Hebrews 12: 1-2].

This is one of the great, moving passages of the New Testament. And in it the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, today's Second Reading, has given us a summary of the Christian life, with five components. Let us take a look at each of them together.

In the Christian life we have **a goal**. The Christian is not a tourist in life, who returns every night to the place from which they started. The Christian is a pilgrim who is for ever “on the way.” And the goal is to be with Jesus Christ forever in heaven. The Christian is going somewhere, and so we should ask ourselves, as we examine our consciences at the end of each day, “Am I any further on?”

In the Christian life we have **an inspiration**. We have the thought of the unseen “great cloud of witnesses,” the saints. They have witnessed their loyalty to Christ by their lives and by their deaths, and now they are witnesses of our performance. The Christian is like a runner in a crowded Olympic stadium. The crowds looking down are those who have already won the crown. And they are praying us on to victory.

In the Christian life we all have **a handicap**. And that is the handicap of sin. We all come into this world marked with the sin of Adam and Eve, original sin. And throughout our lives we add our personal sins. No one would try to climb Mount Everest with a hundred pounds of lumber on their back, weighing them down. If we want to travel far, we must travel light. There may be sinful habits, pleasures, self-indulgences that hold us back. We must shed them as athletes shed their track suits when they go to the starting-place for the race. And we have the merciful forgiveness of Jesus Christ to enable us to do so.

In the Christian life we have **an example**. And that example is Jesus Himself. To achieve His goal as the Savior of the world meant the way of the Cross for Him. And He willingly embraced it. As Jesus endured His Cross out of love for us, so must we follow His example. For He taught us, “Whoever wishes to be My follower must deny their very self, take up their cross each day, and follow in My steps” [Luke 9: 23].

In the Christian life we have **a presence**: the presence of Jesus. He is at once the goal of our journey, and our companion on the way. He is the One whom we go to meet, and the One with whom we travel.

The wonder of the Christian life is that we press on daily, surrounded by the saints who have already made the journey and reached the final goal and are forever in the company of Jesus. And “this great cloud of witnesses” encourages us now with the support of their prayers, and they wait to welcome us home to heaven when our time on earth is completed too.

This passage from the Letter to the Hebrews points our five components of the Christian life: 1) We have a goal: to be with Jesus Christ forever in heaven. 2) We have an inspiration: “the great cloud of witnesses,” the saints. 3) We have a handicap: our sins. 4) We have an example: Jesus Christ Himself. 5) We have a presence: Jesus is the goal of our journey and our companion on the way.

“Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us, and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” [Hebrews 12: 1-2].

We do not travel the road of life as pilgrims all by ourselves.

“We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,” the saints.

So let us live “while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus,” as we follow Him today and every day on our pilgrimage to heaven.