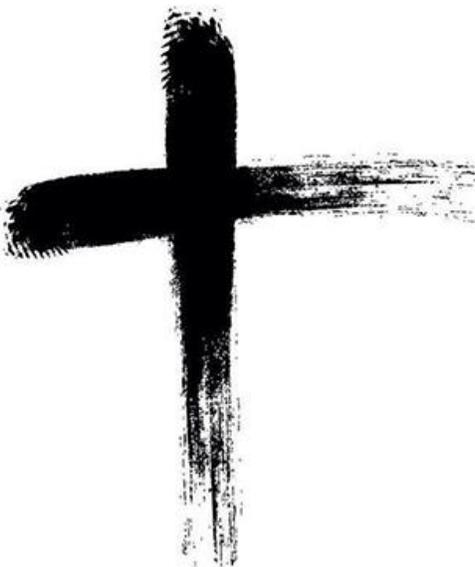


## DISCIPLINE



Matthew 6:21 "(Jesus said to the crowd), 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'"

So, I spoke with my grandchildren over the weekend, and all they could talk about was the recent Olympics Games in China! Evidently, their parents allowed them to watch a lot of the Olympic coverage on television as a kind of babysitting for my grandchildren, I suspect. Nonetheless, at the end of the conversation, my eldest granddaughter in great seriousness asked me whether it would be okay, Grandpa, if she decided to become an Olympic athlete? "Yes, of course," I told her. "Of course, it

would be okay." But I also warned her that it wasn't as easy as that. One cannot simply 'decide' to become a world class athlete. I told all my grandchildren there that it takes years and years of training; of blood, sweat, and tears to become an Olympic athlete. I told them that if they thought it was onerous having to practice their piano lessons 30 minutes a day, then they had better think twice before deciding to become an Olympic hero.

I explained to my grandchildren how such athletes had to discipline themselves, how they had to train rigorously, how everyday they had to get up very early to practice for hours in the morning before school and then again for hours and hours after school --- and then *all day* on the weekends. I explained to my grandchildren how these athletes sacrifice much of their life in order to fulfill their Olympic dreams, how they do not get to do the things most young people do, they do not have the time to 'play' as other children do, they only get to practice and practice and practice. I explained how these athletes work and work and devote their time and energy and spirit for years and years on end sometimes for a single chance to make the team or win a medal. And I also warned them how most never do succeed at all.

And even if they do succeed, I tried to explain to my grandchildren how short-lived the victory usually is. I then told them that famous monologue from the movie "Patton" of how "for over a thousand years Roman conquerors returning from the wars

enjoyed the honor of a triumph, a tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeters and musicians and strange animals from the conquered territories, together with carts laden with treasure and captured armaments. (And how) The conqueror rode in a triumphal chariot, the days' prisoners walking in chains before him. . . (And how) A slave stood behind the conqueror holding a golden crown (over his head) and whispering in his ear a warning, that all glory is fleeting."

Olympic glory may be a worthy and admirable goal, but it is a goal that is surely fleeting. Do you really want to sacrifice your life for an athletic glory that is so transitory, I asked them? Indeed, I remembered later that couplet from A.E. Housman's poem *To an Athlete Dying Young*,

And early though the laurel grows,  
It withers quicker than the rose

Instead, I suggested to my grandchildren that they seek after the things that last, things like love and goodness and generosity and integrity, like being able to easily laugh at oneself, or being willing to take the hand of someone who is hurting and cry with them, like being able to commit random acts of kindness, or being sensitive to the pain and anguish of those around us. These are the things for which to strive, I told them. These are the goals that are truly important in life and having a lasting effect upon all who are touched by them. --- But then alas, these things too do not come easily either. Learning to do

these things too requires much energy and discipline and sacrifice. These goals too demand much blood, sweat, and tears from those who seek after them.

Now Lent is the traditional season for Christians to reflect upon our priorities, our goals, our dreams, about what kind of heroes we want to be; and to review our lives and how well we are accomplishing those goals. The things we are seeking here as Christians are not easy at all. Why don't we love more, care more, learn more, give more? Thus it is common in the Church to take on Lenten disciplines during this time, to promise to ourselves, and to God, that we will struggle to do certain things that we know that we ought to do; that we want to do -- that we will attend Church more regularly and pray more often perhaps, that we will make a special effort during this time to care for the poor and needy, to be charitable in some definable way with our time and our talents, or in some specific manner to better show our love to our family and our neighbors, and even unto our enemies. These Lenten disciplines that we take on are not meant to "punish" us for our sins, as they are so often misconstrued to be, but they are meant to aid us in achieving the goals and dreams we seek as Christians. If we are truly serious about our Christian vocations, and I often wonder whether we really are at times, but if we are truly serious about our Christian vocations, then it can only be accomplished by great effort. Our Lenten disciplines, whatever they are, whatever we choose, they can

effect changes and establish new patterns in our lives, so that the activities we seek eventually become part of the very habit of our being, a part of who we are, and who we want to be. And year by year, little by little, our lives can be changed and transformed by such efforts, until finally we are not the persons that we once were, but are more the persons that we long to be, that God calls us to be, full of love and mercy and compassion, and ready to run the race that is set before us.

In the end, discipline remains an inescapable part of what it means to be a disciple. And where your treasure is, there your heart will be also AMEN.