

## **The Winners are the Losers**

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

September 16, 2018

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American society is all about winning. What can I do to get to the top, make the most money, and have power over the people who are below me. It is like a game: the winners will prosper with nice houses and cars, and the losers will live in poor neighborhoods and not have nice things. We even have a version of this game in the Church: those who can accumulate the most grace will win and be rewarded with heaven and the losers are those who are great sinners and will be punished by an angry God for all eternity.

In our Gospel this weekend from *Mark*, that whole way of thinking is called into question. Jesus says, “for whoever wishes to save her life will lose it, but whoever loses her life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it.” He seems to suggest that who we think are the winners are actually the losers and who we think are the losers are actually the winners. Losing is not a bad thing. In fact, it is the key to entering into a Gospel way of life.

*Isaiah* the prophet had it right in our Old Testament reading today. He says that it is OK to look like a loser. “I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not hide from buffets and spitting.” Notice he didn’t get defensive or try to assert himself when he was attacked. He simply allowed himself to be a loser in the eyes of his foes. It didn’t bother him because he knew that the Lord God was his help.

The game that we’ve been given to play by our society, and unfortunately even in the Church at times, is not consistent with the Gospel. The Gospel teaches us that our lives are saved when we reach the point of not having to win this game. We are to find abundant life in the Lord when we are no longer overly concerned with building up our wealth, ensuring our security, and our asserting ourselves as number 1. All of that is passing. ‘Whoever wishes to save his life must lose it.’

Thomas Merton, the famous Trappist monk, once made the statement that so many people climb the ladder of success only to realize once they get to the top that their ladder was leaning against the wrong wall.

*For the Gospel, the real winners are the ones who look like their losing.*

Question: Using Thomas Merton's analogy, what is the wall that my ladder is leaning up against? Is it the wall of society (which isn't all bad) or the wall of the Gospel? May we make sure we are in line with the Gospel, for when we are leaning up against the wall of the Gospel, we then realize that we can not only go up on a ladder, but also, like Jesus the Messiah, we can go down.