

FOURTH SUNDAY IN O.T. - B

Today's second reading has to be understood in the context of the time in which it was written.

As I mentioned last Sunday, St. Paul's presumption is that the Lord is going to return very soon.

With that expectation, it makes sense that he might encourage Christians to remain unmarried.

Remember last weekend he suggested that those who were married should act as if they were not married.

The focus of every Christian was on preparing for the Lord's return.

Almost 2,000 years later, we are still waiting, but we should also still be preparing.

As Jesus once said, "You do not know the day nor the hour."

But over the centuries we have come to believe that in the Sacrament of Matrimony, the couple's relationship is the way they prepare for the coming of the Lord.

The purpose of the Sacrament is to help each other "get to heaven."

That really should be the foundation of all relationships including marriage, familial, and friendship.

Everything we do is a preparation for eternal life, and we should avoid anything that would be a "distraction" to "adherence to the Lord."

God the Father sent Jesus his Son with an authority greater than all of the prophets of old, greater than even that of Moses.

As we heard last weekend, Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God.

That Kingdom is present among us now even as we await the fullness of its revelation in heaven.

The authority of Jesus to cast out demons as well as the other miracles he performed were all signs of the in-breaking of God's Kingdom.

In Jesus, the Kingdom of God is actualized as the extension of God's mercy.

That is the heart of the Gospel ... that's why it is called "Good News."

Paul says that he is writing to the Corinthians so that they might "be free of anxieties."

Jesus came among us and is present with us even now in order to free us from fear.

God's mercy releases us from the fear of damnation and the burden of trying to earn our salvation.

You and I have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us live the Gospel with courage and selflessness.

That's what "adherence to the Lord without distraction" really means.

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Last week I encouraged each of us to prepare for the upcoming season of Lent by reflecting upon what the Lord is calling us to do in terms of prayer, penance, and almsgiving.

Regarding penance, let's consider what might be distracting us from our relationship with the Lord as well as with others.

When we "give something up" we are supposed to be creating space in our lives for being present to Jesus.

When we give up a specific type of food, for instance, our resulting hunger reminds us that only God can truly fill and satisfy us.

Cutting out TV or internet time allows us to spend more time in prayer and spiritual reading, as well as interacting with others who might be in need of our attention.

Getting out of bed fifteen minutes earlier could create a space for spiritual reflection before we start our day.

Whatever we decide to do in terms of penance, let's try to make it both meaningful and manageable.

Being realistic about our limitations while at the same time challenging them is what Lent is all about.

Lent is ultimately a season of humility and grace.

If we try to take it seriously, our Lenten pilgrimage helps us to become more aware of the presence of God's Kingdom among us, and better prepared for its fulfillment in eternal life.