

Lent – Springtime for the Soul

It's "March Madness" ... fans are everywhere. Look up in the stands and you'll see someone flash it. You'll see it in football, too ... probably in the end zone. In baseball, it's usually in the far left or right field seats where the camera will pan when a hitter tries to knock one out of the park.

<SHOW "JOHN 3:16" SIGN>

This simple sign could be described as a "get out of jail free card" or – more accurately – a "**KEEP** out of **HELL** free card."

It's the "**FREE TICKET**" most of our protestant brothers and sisters tout to possible converts. No charge. No sweat at all.

All you have to do is accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

And ... as far as that goes ... I agree with them.

There is a story about a certain man who died and arrived at the pearly gates. St. Peter greeted him and said: "You need a thousand points to get in. How many do you have?"

"I don't know," said the man.

"Well," said St. Peter, "tell me all the good things you have done in your life and we'll see what you have earned."

So the man began ticking off everything he could think of. He was an Eagle Scout, active in the St. Vincent de Paul Society and Meals on Wheels; he was a Minister to the Sick and he ushered at Sunday Mass.

When at length he had finished, St. Peter added up the score and told him that he had accumulated ... a hundred points.

Thoroughly deflated, the man hung his head and sighed, "I guess it's only by the grace of God that I'll **EVER** get into this place."

"That," said St. Peter, "is worth a thousand points. Come on in!"

While we have to remember that this is only a joke, it is certainly true that it is only through **GRACE** that we are saved, not through any effort of our own.

That said, we read what the Paulist writer said in Ephesians:

“For by **GRACE** you have been **SAVED** through **FAITH**,” and this is not from you; it is a **GIFT** from God; It is not from **WORKS**, so no one may boast.”

But then he continues:

“For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **FOR THE GOOD WORKS** ... ”

What does that mean to us?

It **MEANS** that while we are **SAVED** through **GRACE** we also must **LIVE** as Christ commanded.

We must **FOLLOW** him.

And – as followers – we are to live our lives as Christians, helping one another.

ACTING like Christians.

So ... how **DO** Christians act?

Our **SALVATION** is **GIFT**.

Do we just pass on the gift? Just pass on that “Get out of Hell free card”?

Is that all there is to being a Christian?

NO!!!

When people see **US**, they need to see **JESUS**. Those wristbands that were so popular a few years ago – “**W-W-J-D**” or “What would Jesus do?” – truly are a barometer of our **FAITH!**

For, without **FAITH**, just like in that story, our good works are **NOT** sufficient to save us. But **JUST** believing – without acting on it – is hardly what Jesus had in mind either.

Our salvation **IS** a gift. There is not doubt about that. We **CANNOT** earn it!

But neither are we to hide our faith under a basket!!!

“John 3:16” is like a **SEED**.

If we let it, it lodges itself in our hearts and it begins to transform us into Christ himself.

Our Catechumens recently attended the Rite of Election at the Cathedral and became “**THE ELECT**.” They and those who were previously baptized in other Christian faiths will soon be received **FULLY** into the Catholic Church.

They, like us, have been **ELECTED** by Jesus!!!

Not because of our good looks. Not because of our sparkling personalities. Not because of our brilliant insights. And **NOT** because of our great achievements. But because of His **MERCY** and His **GRACE**!!!

And once we’ve received that mercy ... that grace ... we are changed. We are changed inside and out. And his imprint on our souls lasts **FOREVER**. It shines forth from us and we truly cannot help but to do His will.

But, like the gospel says, there are those who cannot **STAND** the light. They do not want to be seen because their hearts and their works are **EVIL**.

And – therefore – they hate **US** as followers of Christ.

But we – who live the truth – not only come to the light ... we **SHINE** with Christ's light. And as John says, our "works may be clearly seen as done **IN** God"!

This season of **LENT** ... which means **SPRING** ... is **OUR** springtime. A springtime of the soul. With that **SEED** of God's grace – so aptly described in John's gospel – we can grow like vines which have suddenly been brought into the light of the springtime sun.

We can **GROW** as Christ **INTENDED** us to grow, doing his work ...not to save ourselves but **BECAUSE** we **ARE** saved, saved through our belief in Christ. We do His work **BECAUSE** of that saving Grace ... a grace that **NEVER** denies us, no matter how many times we fail Him.

Through His promise, He **NEVER** fails **US**.

<END>

Copyright © 2009 Robert J. Skinner All Rights Reserved