

**The Passion of Christ:  
The Race to Achieve the Goal  
5 LENT C**

**“I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”**

Home ownership is a good thing if you like to be owned by a home. Unfortunately homes own more of us than we them! In our American psyche owning a home is a primary goal of young adults. Staying in a home is the goal of those paying on big mortgages. Ownership is a good thing. It is a good thing for people to work hard, to build their lives, and be at peace with themselves and others. We, who own or ... share that ownership with the bank, feel that we have something in life that is truly ours (especially when it's paid off!)/ What we center our lives upon motivates us and drives us to look deeper within ourselves. To whom and to what will I give myself?

As a homeowner, I made a choice to take control of my time by reducing the size of my yard when I bought my home. The number of gadgets in my garage is a testament to my efforts to shorten my time in the yard when I owned a larger yard! One of those gadgets in my electric gallery is the power washer. This robot on wheels spits out water at up to 1650 psi (pounds per square inch) and is guaranteed to chip the paint off my automobile. It clears gutters, siding, driveways and stray cats. But it will not make my life any less complex. It will not eliminate the time required to learn one more new gadget. Ironically, and this thought always puts a smile on my face, it does surreptitiously, give me a sense of power until a better toy comes to Home Depot.

What do you really own? And what owns you?

The scriptures today speak of ownership. Clearly God wants to be in a relationship of ownership with his people. It is a relationship of trust. It recalls the covenant that Yahweh had established during the first Exodus, when he made a road through the sea and destroyed the chariots of Egypt. Now in today's reading of Second Isaiah, God is about to do a new thing and create a new Exodus for his people. He will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. He will go after his possession and bring them back from exile in Babylon. The water he gives in the wilderness will be a refreshing drink for his chosen ones. Were they formed for Babylon? Were they formed for Egypt? Yahweh says, "I formed them for myself so they might declare

my praise.” It is ownership, it is a covenant, it is the relationship we have by faith with our God that binds us together. Yet we want the power of that relationship and what that gives us, but not the suffering that goes with it.

St. Teresa of Avila understood both power and suffering. She had great spiritual strength. She knew the intimacy of Jesus for herself. But she suffered with severe back pain most of her life, and even more, she suffered rejection by the church over and over again. This was the church she loved, but it told her "no" many times when she asked for a Carmelite convent to be established.

The story is told of Teresa crossing a muddy, swollen river. Her horse unceremoniously dumps her in the middle. She stands up, shakes her fists at God, asking why she is being treated so. God replies, “This is how I always treat my best friends.” And Teresa, undaunted, shouts back, “No wonder you don’t have very many!” To know Christ and the power of his resurrection is not an easy life. It’s not an easy choice. Yet power and suffering are the inseparable package of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Power and suffering are integral to understanding the owner's manual we call Holy Scripture.

I remember a sailor aboard the USS Mississippi hitting his hand against a steel bulkhead after reading a Dear John letter from his girlfriend, breaking several bones in that hand. His work and performance were compromised. His only other hand could only be used to clean the toilets. And oh, how expert he became! Our life is not our own!

Uncle Sam tells serviceman where to serve, when to eat, where to go for healing, he houses him, he gives tools and resources for ministry to the chaplain, and also tells service members they may have to die in harms way for the good of their country.

The cost of ownership can be high. Over 2200 Americans have lost their lives in Iraq in the last 5 years. At a farewell lunch for my assistant I struck up a conversation with a newly retired First Sgt. with 26 years of service in the U.S. Army. He had just returned from Iraq, and before that Afghanistan, South America, and then he told us when he was in Panama in the eighties. This man was a Green Beret. And this man had full-blown Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. All I could say was, "Sgt. Americans will never know the extent of what you have done. Thank you!" The truth is I didn't know what to say.

"I solemnly swear or affirm to defend and protect the Constitution of the United States, against all enemies foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God." That is an oath of ownership.

The oath of office is similar to our baptismal vows. Both the baptismal covenant and the oath of office call upon us all to enter into a covenant bound by promises we make to God and that God makes to us. This is a covenant of ownership. And the owner of the vineyard collects what is his own. It is not a lease to own agreement, as the tenants of the parable thought and found otherwise to their misfortune. Our covenant with God is not a rental agreement with U-Haul where we can drop off a truck and forget about it. God's covenant is a life time guarantee of ownership with his people. It is his oath of office that he will be in relationship with you and me if in God we trust.

The apostle Paul suffered the loss of everything and regards them as rubbish in order to gain the presence of Christ. And in his letter to the Philippians, he gives us at Trinity our goal of "knowing Christ," written in our bulletins. For Paul knowing Christ is not quoting Bible verses or even living by the law it is becoming Christ! by sharing in his life, in his death and in his victory! It is a covenant of ownership!

The greatest of New Testament writers, the one who in the rapture of his conversion saw the Risen Lord, even Paul himself writes, that he is not sure he will get to be with Jesus...quote, "if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." He's not sure. He has not reached the finish line. He does not know how the race will end. All he can tell us is that he runs with the wind, against the wind, with all the pneuma and air God has given him, scratching and clawing as he goes toward the goal, one step forward, two step backwards, lungs heaving, face bulging red, to get to the prize. And the prize is the Pontificus Maximus, where the glory is not just the wreath of victory given by a king, but the high calling of God, being able by his mercy and grace to finally stand in the presence of Greatness. For us that presence we race toward as Christians is the Holy of Holies. God himself.

Why bother living this kind of life? Who in their right mind would take up his cross, deny himself and follow a condemned man? When

this Lenten journey just gets too rocky and its uphill all the way may we remember the words,

**I press on to make him my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” From our very atoms to our spirit we are co-mingled in the mystery of the body of Christ. We are the vineyard, we are his, we are not our own, and so together we must go with him to Jerusalem. AMEN!**