

**Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C) Homily
Saint William, Champion | August 21, 2022
Is 66:18-21 | Heb 12:5-7, 11-13 | Lk 13:22-30**

Deacon Robert Mintus

Last Christmas, I got one of the most unusual gifts I have ever received. It was the opportunity to drive a Ford Mustang Shelby GT500 around the Nelson Ledges Race Course last Saturday. Clearly, not something you do every day. My normal car is a Toyota Prius, and suddenly I was behind the wheel with 780 horsepower under my feet. I was on the racetrack with eight other cars that were even more expensive and exotic, including a Corvette, a Lamborghini, a Ferrari, and a pair of Porsches.

But the most important part of the day was the instructional class we had before we got to go on the track. We reviewed how to drive and also received relevant warnings. Put two wheels off the track... it's a \$200 inspection fee... and the costs went up quickly... They had a bumper on display that someone hit an orange cone with... it cost \$15000 just for the replacement part. So, what was the most important thing they told us? It was to always be looking where you wanted to drive... Because if you find yourself looking off the racetrack, that's where you're going to end up.

Shortly afterward, I put on my helmet and when I was buckled into the driver seat, I was partnered up with a professional driver who would tell me when and what to do and set me up for a successful day as long as I listened to her expert instruction... As I rode around the track on my first lap, I noticed a bunch of fresh skid marks going off into the grass... So I made it a point to listen very carefully to my driving instructor and do exactly what she said – partially because I was afraid of going off the track and partially because I trusted that she knew right thing to do. And before I knew it, I had run three laps on the course, and hit speeds of over 100 miles an hour in spots, all under control.

Now... some of you are probably wondering... what does this have to do with today's Gospel?

Well – it's really all about focus. Successfully driving a race car is all about paying attention, and taking the appropriate actions at the right times as you make your way around the track. You can't be just looking at where you are – you have to be looking at where you are going... Let your attention wander, and you find yourself skidding off the track before you realize it. Meanwhile, the other cars out there with you will catch up and pass you by.

So where is the focus of our lives? In our psalm and readings today, we are called to go and make disciples... to live lives that will inspire others. And just like I had an expert driver riding along with me last weekend, to tell me when to brake, when to turn, and when to give it the gas, God works to set us up for success on our metaphorical drive through life. He provides us with our conscience and good friends to help us drive the right path, and even act as our pit crew to tow us back onto the track when things don't go well.

But it's easy to lose focus on our journey of life. Our modern American culture provides us with lots of things to distract us from staying on the right path and driving the right line. Pick anything you want... we can get it delivered to you, maybe even the same day. Did you hear the story of the youngster who got ahold of his mother's cell phone and ordered a ton of toys on her Amazon cart? And we can come up with tons of excuses about where we went off course, but just like I was reminded last weekend... where you find yourself looking, that's where you are going to go... How many people can you think of whose lives are continually going off the road? Maybe there are times when we find ourselves struggling to stay on the right path. Maybe there are the times when we get afraid to put our foot on the gas.

So what is your focus? What do you spend your free time thinking about? If you hit the PowerBall lottery, how would you spend the money? If you were told that you only had a short time to live, how would you spend that precious time? I want you to close your eyes for just a minute... Now, pretend that I am a genie, and you have three wishes. NOTHING is out of bounds... You can have ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING you can ask for... What would you ask for? Youth? Virtue? Popularity? Beauty? Wealth? Love? Power? Fame? Possessions? That is your focus... By the way, did the Kingdom of God, Eternal Life, or Heaven make your short list?

Today, Jesus reminds us that it is all about where we choose to focus our lives that matters – just like he asked about where our treasure lies last week. And it is all about where we want to go from here that matters... Because of our gift of free will, as much as God loves us... he can't force us to choose Him. Many of us have the image of St. Peter at the pearly gates. But I think that at the end of our life, it won't be a matter of him telling us where we are being sent, it will be a matter of him letting us know what WE PICKED. Ultimately, we decide where we will end up at the end of our earthly life here. Is Jesus the focus of our life, or is he just an acquaintance?

And that's exactly why we gather each weekend... our Mass and the other Sacraments are our driver meetings – to warn us about what hazards we may expect to encounter on our drive and how we might work to navigate them, and to encourage us to stay focused on the course and compete well. And with their help – we can run our race successfully. Drive safely!