

Homily for 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

It was 1924. The Olympics were being held in Paris. It was the first Olympics that the sport of canoe racing was added to the list of games. The American Team was favored to win. American Bill Havens was part of that first canoe race team. He was excited beyond words to be part of this experience.

But there was a problem. Bill's wife was pregnant and it seemed clear that she would give birth to their first child about the same time that Bill would be competing in Paris.

In a time when there were no jet airliners and only slow moving ships, Bill faced a dilemma: go to Paris and miss the birth of his child or stay home. Bill's wife insisted he go. She knew how many years he had worked for this. For Bill the decision was easy. He stayed home. He considered being with his wife a higher priority than going to Paris.

The United States won the Gold. Bill's wife was late in giving birth. In fact, she was so late that Bill could have easily gone to Paris and made it back in time. People said: "What a shame!"

Bill said he had no regrets. His commitment to his wife was more important . It would always be more important.

One of the most challenging aspects of life is commitment. It is a choice. It is a decision. It locks us into a pattern of conduct that determines all or part of our life. It is commitment that is at the heart of today's readings.

Joshua proclaims that he and his family will serve the Lord. St. Paul, in a reading that is too often misunderstood, speaks of a commitment of mutual respect and love as the work of husband and wife. And Peter sums it up nicely when he proclaims his commitment of faith and says: "Lord, to whom shall we turn."

Commitment demands a great deal. Commitment demands 100% of ourselves...not 50 or 70%. To commit ourselves is to put other things behind us in order that we might be faithful...faithful to God and to each other. Commitment isn't always easy. But commitment transforms our lives. It is only commitment that opens us to achieving goals and reaping awards that would never be ours without our willingness to commit ourselves.

Allow me to return to the story of Bill Havens:

It is now 28 years later. It is 1952. It is time for the Olympics in Helsinki, Finland. The son that was born to Bill Havens and his wife is now competing and he sends his father this cablegram which I quote exactly:

“Dad, I won.
I’m bringing home the gold medal you lost
while waiting for me to be born.”

The commitment of Bill Havens became the inspiration for his son. It also becomes an inspiration for anyone who hears his story. It teaches us that our own commitments, and especially our commitment to Christ and to each other, are the inspiration that we bring to countless people that we touch by our actions and our lives.