

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (2025 - C)

In our second reading today, Saint Paul said this:

“Brothers and sisters: Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

So what did he mean by that? What does it mean to say “Our citizenship is in heaven?”

Well, think about what it's like when you travel to another country. You can't just walk across the border and then do whatever you like. You are a foreigner. So, first you have to clear customs. You have to produce your passport and sometimes other documents. You also have to answer certain questions. You will be asked the purpose of your visit and how long you plan to stay. Usually people in other countries also speak a different language.

On the other hand, when you return home to the U.S., on entering you notice right away there are two lines, one for citizens and the other for non-citizens. After the customs officer looks at your passport and verifies that all is in order, he then says, “Welcome home!” You are back in your own country, in the place where you belong.

Or consider this idea. We have all heard the word alien. Lots of science fiction movies are about aliens. Aliens are beings from other worlds who somehow show up here on earth. These strange creatures don't belong here. Their home is somewhere else.

With these ideas in mind, think again about what Saint Paul said. If we are citizens of heaven, then we are not citizens of earth. If heaven is our home, then we are foreigners here on earth. This world is not our home. We are just visitors here on Earth. Aliens if you will, and that was Saint Paul's point. As Catholic Christians, we must never forget that our citizenship is in heaven; heaven is our home; it's where we belong.

Now lots of people don't know this or don't believe this. They have no idea God made them for heaven, and so, **“their minds are occupied with earthly things.”**

Suppose as a small child, your parents took you to live in a foreign country, but they never told you that you were an American. You would grow up speaking the language and learning the customs of that foreign land. You would think it was your homeland.

A boy or girl whose parents didn't teach them about God or about what must be done and believed to get to heaven would be like that.

Or suppose as an adult you moved to a foreign country. Then after you had learned the language and the customs, you decided to stay. After a while, you would become used to things. You would develop new habits and new routines and new tastes. Finally, if you stayed for many years, memories of your true homeland would fade and your desire to return home would fade with them.

There are people who were taught about God and about heaven, but who are no longer interested in going there. They are like someone who has moved to a foreign country. They may not have intentionally renounced their heavenly citizenship, but for all intents and purposes, they have shifted their allegiance.

In fact, Saint Paul says there are many people who occupy their minds with earthly things. They live as if earth was their home. He also says there are people who **“conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ”** which brings up another point.

Instead of loving the cross of Jesus, earthly people really do hate it. Earthly people are not interested in any kind of cross that will help them get to heaven because they aren't really interested in going there. If getting to heaven requires some sacrifice, then forget it.

On the other hand, earthly people will practice self-denial for earthly pleasures. So they will spend hundreds of dollars on a fine meal with exquisite wines. They will exercise every day to stay in shape. They will undergo botox injections or plastic surgery to enhance their looks. They will be the first to wear the latest styles and fashions and so on. Saint Paul said **“Their god is their stomach ... Their minds are occupied with earthly things.”**

We must not follow them. We must remember that we are not home. We are aliens here on earth. We are foreigners.

Those who believe their citizenship is in heaven are different from earthly people in another way. They have a love for the cross. Recently, I was talking to someone who told me, “I thank God for my cross because it has taught me so much about what is really important in life.”

We all know the significance of the Cross of Christ. It was the means by which our salvation was attained. Jesus once said to his disciples, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mt 16:24).”** So, to follow Jesus means, we must first deny ourselves, next take up our own cross and last, carry it after Jesus.

And notice that this is not optional for us. It is required for those who want to go to heaven. Earthly people do not believe this. Earthly people are occupied with earthly things, and yet some still expect to claim a place in heaven. However, here is what Saint Paul said of these people, “Their end is destruction.” In other words, they will not be going to heaven.

Now Saint Paul was not happy about this. He was grieved over this because God had made them for heaven, and yet, they had renounced their citizenship in heaven.

We disciples of the Lord Jesus must look at things differently from earthly people. As citizens of heaven, we must embrace our own personal cross as the means of our own personal sanctification.

It's a fact that our own personal cross was designed by God just for us. We all have our own personal cross that only fits on our shoulder; it wasn't designed for multiple use. Our cross matches our height. It's the right length for us so that it drags on the ground behind us. It's also the right weight for us. Not so heavy we cannot carry it, but not so light that we don't notice it.

So what's the point? What purpose does our cross serve? Obviously, crosses are not pleasant. They are not easy things to carry. They are not enjoyable, but crosses do have an important purpose. They help us submit to the will of God.

Crosses help us realize life isn't only about us, that we are not the center of the universe. Our cross help us look beyond ourselves to the needs of others. Our cross also help us realize that there are things we can't do on our own, things that require the help of others and the help of God. Our cross help us come to terms with our own limitations, to recognize that we aren't little gods and goddesses of all we survey.

Finally, and most importantly, our cross help us to love. It forces us to go beyond ourselves to the needs of others and to a recognition that we are in fact dependent upon God for everything. Once you come to that point, then you are ready for heaven.

Consider how this works in real life. Suppose your cross is old age. You cannot do all the things you once did. Your health is not so good, and you are constantly going to the doctor. At that point, you can accept your cross and see it as a reminder that all you have comes from God and is His free gift to you. In humility, you can accept the loving help of others and give back a smile and prayers. You can see your condition as God's reminder that your time here on earth is drawing to a close and soon you will see God.

Or, you can reject your cross and become angry with God. You can complain all of the time about what you can't do. You can behave in a way that makes you a cross for those who care for you, and those who are trying to help you.

Suppose your cross is the rejection of someone you love, a spouse who deserts you or a parent who does not love you or a child who abandons you. Loneliness is a particularly painful cross. There is a lot of loneliness in the world today because there is not enough love.

If rejection is your cross, you can accept that and turn to God at those times. He will fill the void in your heart, and your cross will serve as a reminder that only God can truly fill our hearts. The loss of our earthly relationships doesn't mean the loss of our heavenly ones as well. God will never leave us, and He will always be there for us.

Jesus tells us that we must take up our own personal cross and follow Him if we wish to enter into eternal life. Unlike earthly people who are enemies of the cross of Christ, we must consider the cross our friend. We followers of Jesus must love His cross and embrace it because by His holy cross He has redeemed the world.

Lent is a time for us to reflect more carefully on the things of life, and when we do, we come to see value in the cross. It helps us see that earth is not our home and that we shouldn't become too comfortable here because we are only passing through. As Saint Paul said, **"We have our citizenship in heaven, and from it we also await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."** Amen.