**Looking To Jesus**

In Hebrews 11-12:2 we have one of the most picturesque and most graphic description regarding the journey of faith, its perseverance and its destination. In chapter 11 we see the brilliant parade of the heroes of faith in the Old Testament. After having presented them all in 12:1-2 the writer brings them and presents them as spectators in an arena, as though encouraging the athletes, those who are running the race, with the finish line being Jesus himself. The runners are prompted to fix their eyes on Jesus, as the finish line.

In the ancient world the training of runners was done in a quite different way from today’s training. The runner had to tie weights at his waist, or at his ankles, during training. When the time came to run for competition, the runner had to remove all the weights in order to run fast and win, just as the writer says, “Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race…, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”, as though Jesus were the finish line.

In the Greek text the word “pioneer” can also be interpreted as “founder”. In the New International Version it is “author and perfecter”, and in in the New English Bible we read, “on whom faith depends from start to finish”. In other words, we must “look to Jesus” not only as the finish line of our journey of faith, but also as the example to follow, for He ran and finished the race. Now he is on the other side waiting for us to finish our race of faith; and in order to run fast on a straight line, we must fix our eyes on Jesus.

What a picture! What an image! The arena, the tiers with the spectators, the heroes of faith on them, encouraging the athletes, the Christians, to run in their journey of faith, and the finish line Jesus!

This is also the picture of Christian life, which starts with faith in Jesus Christ. It is through that faith that we come to receive grace from God; and it is that grace that enables us to run the course. Grace lifts us and gives us a second chance. Without grace it is utterly impossible to finish the journey of faith, i.e. to remain faithful to the initial commitment we have made to God.

The Apostle Paul so many times refers to this grace as his life “in Christ”. He says in his epistle to the Philippians (4:13), “I can do all things through him who strengthens me”. In Romans 8:35-37 after enumerating all the difficulties, the pitfalls, the dangers, the hardships, like distress, persecution, famine, sword and other adversities, he says, “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him (i.e. Jesus Christ) who loved us”.

In II Timothy when the Apostle realizes his end is at hand, he says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord…, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (4:7-8).

May God give us grace to finish our journey of faith likewise, always looking to Jesus. Amen!