

Pray to finish on the right side of the line!

There's a **tiny little town**, 20 miles north of **Chicago** called **Fox Lake** that holds their **Fireman's Fall Festival** about this time each year. I got to attend this event **many years ago** and can still remember a **particular competition** they had that got **many people** involved.

Being about the size of **Warrior**, they closed off **their main street** for the afternoon and **the Firemen** hooked up **two fire hoses** to nearby fire hydrants. Then **teams of 6** people each would come forward to pick up **one of the hoses** for the water battle.

Here's how it worked: A **6" wide line** had been painted across the width of the street and they placed an **empty Stainless Steel Beer Keg** on this line in the center of the street.

When **the Judge** shouted "**go**" the **hoses** were turned on full force and a **timer** was started. **Each team** now had to do their best to hold up **the heavy hose** and direct its spray onto **the Beer Keg** to move it to **the other side of the line** painted on the street.

Well **the Keg** was swirling and turning every which way **as the opposing streams** of **water** moved it around. **Back and forth** it would go as **the teams** fought to keep their stream directly on the moving Keg.

At **the end of 1 minute**, the **Judge** called **time** and **the hoses** were turned off and **whichever team ... was at that moment** holding the keg across the line in **enemy territory ... was the winner!**

The **teams** played mighty hard and **everyone** had a lot of fun. **Most of the contests** were pretty evenly matched with **the Keg** going back and forth over the line **many times** during **the one-minute game**.

But there were **a few instances** where **one team** would do **a great job** of keeping the keg across the line for **most all** of the time, **but** would slip up and allow the keg to fall back into **their territory** just as time expired ... and **so ... they** would lose!

You see, in this contest,
the winner was not determined by **how long** you kept the keg across the line,
the winner was determined by **which side of the line ... the keg was on ...**
when the **time expired**.

It's **kind of like** watching a **NASCAR race** ... where **winning** is not determined by
how many laps you led the race ... **rather**, **the winner** is **the driver** who led the
last lap and crossed the finish line first after driving **so many miles**.
The one who is leading at the end ... wins!

And so, in the **Crazy Keg Contest**, even though you might have successfully held the keg across the line for something like a **full 55 seconds ... if you allowed the Keg to slip backward across the line onto your side as time expired ...** you would actually lose the whole contest!

Now, **the reverse of this** was also true, meaning that even though you may have been unable to get the Keg across the line for a full 55 seconds ... if you finally managed to move the Keg over the line just as time expired ... you would actually win the whole contest!

To me, there's a huge theological truth in this Krazy Keg contest!

It has to do with how souls will either win or lose the crown of Heaven ...

Because that too depends ... on what side of the line they're on ... when time runs out ... and God calls them home.

In our **First Reading** today, **God** speaking through the **Prophet Ezekiel**, points out that if a virtuous person, turns away from virtue to commit sin, and then dies, that final state of their soul will determine whether or not they are eligible for Heaven.

If their life should end at a time when they've turned away from goodness and they're in Mortal Sin, they will be caught on the wrong side of the line (so to speak) and they will lose the contest ... they will lose Eternal Life with God in Heaven!

Yes, **God is warning us** that **even though** we may spend our whole life being good, **if we should fall into serious sin and die in that state, we lose. And we don't get to play again!** The side of the line that we're on at our death has eternal consequences.

So Ezekiel brings us very distressing news. But he also brings us very encouraging news too!

For in that **same** reading, **he points out** that **if a wicked person, repents of his wickedness and does what is right and just,** he shall preserve his eternal life!

You see, **once again ... it's all in how you finish!**

It reminds me of that famous saying, "It's not over till it's over".

You hear this a lot in Sports competitions.

If you're winning at half time the **Coach** will speak words of **caution,** "Keep up the good work ... keep playing hard because "It's not over till it's over".

If you're losing at half-time, the **Coach** will speak words of **hope,** "Don't give up ... c'mon you can do it ... try harder because "It's not over till it's over".

So the little phrase “*It’s not over till it’s over*”
has both a **challenging** and a **comforting** connotation.

The **phrase** is **challenging** from the **standpoint** that as long as we live ... we’ll never get to the point where we can let down our guard and relax and fall into serious sin.

Because if on the day we die, we’re on the wrong side of the line, we lose!

So, the challenge is to remain faithful to God to the very end.
“*It’s not over till it’s over!*” **only then** will we find Eternal Rest ... at the end.

The **phrase** is **comforting** from the **standpoint** that as long as we’re alive, we have the opportunity to approach God and receive forgiveness for our sins.

So where will you be at the end of your life? What side of the line will you be on when you breathe your last? Will you be on God’s side or on the other side?

I’ve had **the privilege** to hear many confessions of the sick and dying ...
people who within a matter of hours or days of receiving God’s forgiveness died.

Wow! They repented of their sins and **their souls** were moved back across the line ... into the Light of God’s grace ... just as their life ended ... so they win!

Please don’t wait till the last minute to call for help for your loved one.
First, there’s no assurance that you’ll be able to get a Priest.
And second there’s no assurance that he’ll be able to get there on time.

Remember **the Sacraments** are for the living ...
they are **God-given channels** of **grace** and **help** to be used while we’re alive.

Please use the **Sacraments** of **Confession** and **Communion** often and don’t be lulled into complacency regarding the way you maintain your relationship with God.

There will never be a time when we can become complacent ...
where we can just coast and assume that we have it made.

That’s **because** the **Devil** will never cease tempting us to turn away from God.
He wants us to backslide and cross the line ... back into old habits and old sins.

In addition to making **regular, even monthly use** of the Sacrament of **Confession**,
we should form the **habit** of making a **Perfect Act of Contrition** every **night** before
we **go to bed** ... kneeling down and saying to God, I’m sorry for my sins and I
firmly resolve with the help of Your grace to sin no more.

The **clock** is running down ... and **each day** we get closer to **the end of the game**.
We need to be **in the state of Grace** when time runs out.

If you ever find yourself taking a **side-trip** away from Him, you **need** to come back to Him as quickly as possible because **you risk** being separated from Him **forever**.

And **if you need something** to motivate you in this regard, just remember what **Jesus** declared in **today's Gospel**. **He said**, "*Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.*" **How about that?**

Jesus is saying that **the greatest of sinners** will be entering Heaven **because** **when they realized their sins** ... **they repented of their sins** and were forgiven, **while the self-righteous** remain blinded to their need to even ask for **forgiveness**.

Remember the Gospel where:

the **Pharisees** brought a woman before Jesus who had been caught in Adultery; **Scripture** says that Jesus crouched down and drew a line in the sand.

On one side was **the woman** caught in sin who fell at the feet of **Jesus**, and **On the other side** were **the self-righteous Pharisees** who ...
after realizing they were sinners too ... went away without repenting!

Two groups ... on two different sides of the line.

Which of them received the mercy of God?

The **woman**, who was on Jesus' side!

Which side of the line are **you** on? **When** was **the last time** you went to **Confession**?
Are you going to go at Christmas? That's **3 months** away.

What if your life ends before Christmas? Are there **sins** that you need to bring to the Lord for healing? **Why wait?** **Why risk dying on the wrong side of the line?**

Please reflect on the fact that **your life** will **someday** come to **an end** ...

and just like with that **Firehose Contest** ... **it's all about** how you finish.

You need to finish on the **right side** of the line.

In the Fireman's Festival you had to hold up the hose and keep it focused on the Keg, following it wherever it moved, until **the water** was turned off and **the hoses** went limp and **the game** was over.

Keeping **the Keg** on **the right side of the line** determines whether we win or lose.

In a **similar way** we have to hold onto our faith and keep it focused on Jesus, following Him wherever he moves, until **our soul** is called home and **our bodies** go limp and **our life** is over.

Keeping **our Soul** on **the right side of the line** will determine whether we win or lose.

So, be faithful to **Jesus** to **the very end** ... because *it's not over till it's over!*