

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:13-14

*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Have you ever heard the expression, "You only learn from experience, yet you have to experience to learn"? So often during my lifetime, whether in my career, my relationships, sports, projects, you name it!...I've experienced failure, coming up short, making mistakes with very unfortunate consequences. The challenge in every case became "what have I learned from this experience?" and "what to do next?"

Years ago, I managed a large construction project with an inexperienced team and the cost overruns almost cost me my job. Through it all, I tried to keep reminding myself that despite the mistakes, what was most important was that I focus on the best I could do, and not let the criticism of others tear me down. I drew solace from a quote of Abraham Lincoln I framed and hung on the wall behind my desk, "If I care to listen to every criticism, let alone act on them, then this shop may as well be closed for all other businesses. I have learned to do my best, and if the end result is good then I do not care for any criticism, but if the end result is not good, then even the praise of ten angels would not make the difference."

Scriptures remind us that mistakes, criticism, falling short, don't doom us to a life or an eternity of failure. But rather, that with a loving God, and through His grace, we can be forgiven our sins and shortcomings, and know that what's important is not the past, but how we continue to strive and endeavor to make a better future, learn from our mistakes, and persevere. The apostle Paul was a classic case of perseverance and a model for us to learn that "the past does not equal the future".

So, let's all "forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead...pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you know us and all our faults and shortcomings, yet we know you will always love us and forgive us our sins. Be our shepherd and renew our strength when we fall, guide us along the right paths, and give us the wisdom and discernment to learn from our experience, try always to improve, and never stop persevering until we join you for eternity. Amen.

~Submitted by Rick Tranquilli for the Thirty-seventh Reading of Lent.