

Now may I speak in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to say just a few brief words about that epistle reading we had from the Book of Hebrews. And I should say that Hebrews is one of my favorite books in the New Testament. So I never give up a chance to preach about it.

So two p's on this passage, two words beginning with 'p.' The first is pioneer. This is the only place in the Bible where Jesus is described as the pioneer of our faith. Or another way of translating it is author. Jesus is the pioneer of our faith. It's a great word. It conjures up the image of Jesus blazing a trail, going before us, Jesus as our hero, our leader. And the key question to ask of any leader, is where are they heading? A leader without a sense of where they're going isn't leading, they're simply going for a walk in the woods.

And to use a baseball image (which I have to be wary of because I know very little about the game of baseball, but it does seem like the time of year when one needs to say something about baseball): Say I was the very ambitious owner of the Padres, and I invested a lot of money. And I wanted to find a general manager. Perhaps the question in my mind is, "Where is this manager gonna lead the team? Where are they capable of taking them?" I don't just want to win the conference, get to the playoffs, or even get to the World Series. I want to win the World Series. And I'd invest my money in finding someone who I felt could lead me all the way, could lead the team all the way to the World Series. That's what you want in a leader. You want to ask, "Where are they going? Where are they capable of taking me?"

And there [are] lots of religious teachers around at the moment who promise to lead their followers to enlightenment, to a discovery of their true inner self. I'm not following them because I don't want to go on a spiritual journey and find me at the end of it. I want to be lead to God, the Creator of the universe. And if we look at the passage from Hebrews, we can see that it is towards God that

Jesus is heading. Jesus, it says, has taken His seat at the throne of God, which is a big theme in the Book of Hebrews, that Jesus has gone before us through the heavens to sit at God's right hand. So we read this typical verse in chapter 10. The writer says, "Therefore my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way He opened for us through the curtain, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

The writer to the Hebrews is convinced that Jesus, the pioneer of our faith, has opened up a new and living way into God's very presence, a way that we are called to follow. The writer emphasizes the fact that Jesus started His journey towards God's right hand as one of us. "Like us in every respect," it says. He shared our beginning and our starting point in our humanity, and blazed a trail to a new end. He lifted our humanity to a place it had never been before. He was the pioneer of our faith, opening up a way through the heavens into God's company. He can lead us into the sanctuary of God. Jesus takes His people by this new and living way into the very presence of God.

Jesus became as we are so that He could lead us into that place where He is, which is a good thing to be reminded of in this week of All Saints, as we celebrate that one festival in the year of which we ourselves are members as God's saints. And we're reminded that we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, following in the trail that Jesus has blazed for us.

So the first 'p' is for pioneer. The second is for perseverance. Jesus is our leader, our pioneer, and we're to follow Him with perseverance. It says this, "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." When asked to describe perseverance, a Christian preacher once said, "It's about taking hold, holding on, and never letting go." When we take hold of faith in Christ, there's much that could shake us off. The road to the throne of God is not easy, it's not straight or smooth, and perseverance is not one long race. It's many short races, one after the other.

The word that's translated here as perseverance is different. It's a patience. It's not simply about accepting things. Perseverance is not a passive activity. It's about an active, steadfast endurance. Think of an explorer heading to the North Pole, dragging a sledge, going against the wind and the snow. That's an image of perseverance.

Now, hopefully, our path won't always be like that. Although I've been in Boston this week and it does feel as if it's like that most of the time. But there'll be times when it will be. There will be times where we need to persevere. There'll be times of doubts, and disbelief, and suffering. That's the time we need to persevere. We have a goal. We know where we're heading, into the very presence of God, following Jesus, the leader and pioneer of our faith. We're not tourists, strolling aimlessly around life's byways. We're pilgrims. We're walking on the high road. We're following Jesus on the way of the cross that leads to the presence of God.

So let us strive for perseverance, to follow Jesus, the pioneer of our faith.

Amen.