

“STRIVING FOR THE FINISH LINE”: THE VALUABLE LESSONS OF ATHLETICS

To bring news of **victory** over the invading Persians in 490 B.C., the Greek **messenger** raced from Marathon to Athens, a distance of nearly 25 miles. According to legend, after making his announcement, the messenger collapsed and died. Thus, was born the **Marathon** running race. To commemorate the ancient run, when the **modern Olympics** resumed in **1896**, the dramatic run was included as an event, set at 40 kilometers (24.85 miles). So how did it morph into a race of **26.2 miles**? When **London** hosted the games in 1908, the course was extended so that the race began on the **Windsor Castle** lawn and finished in front of the Royal Box at the Olympic Stadium, a distance that was 26 miles and 385 yards. Incidentally, if the race were exactly 26 miles, it would end **just beyond** the Cathedral front steps! If all goes according to plan, the Cathedral **bells** will **peal** at **10:08 a.m.**, signaling the arrival of the lead runners.

“Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win.” (1 Corinthians 9:24) Long before any hint of “participation” trophies for youth, healthy competition presumed there would be both **winners** and **losers**. How dare I even utter the latter word! This weekend, thousands of runners will pass by the Cathedral in the events surrounding the annual Twin Cities Marathon. Billed as The Most Beautiful Urban Marathon in America®, it is easy to see why. The Minneapolis lakes, Mississippi River and historic Summit Ave., combine to beckon runners to gaze upon the beauty of creation, even as their knees are aching! It is also **40 years** since the first Twin Cities Marathon took place in 1982. Nearly **300,000** will see a portion of the races live, whether the main event on Sunday or several shorter races on Saturday.

Yet, by one account, among the **9500** Marathoners and 11,000 10-mile runners, only a few will be crowned “winners” in any official sense. But one needn’t win a blue ribbon to feel a sense of success and accomplishment. Much of a runner’s competition is **within**. They know this, whether striving for a PR (Personal record), or running for other reasons, including in **honor** of a friend who is ill with cancer or a loved one who has died. The “battle” is largely an **interior** one, preceded by months of serious training. There is no substitute for setting our sights on a goal and working assiduously to achieve that goal. Thousands this weekend will receive their “affirmation” simply by knowing that they gave it their all and reached their goal. They need nothing more. Runners attest to the power and necessity of **setting goals**. Without them and absent a strict training regimen, failure is all but assured.

How different is it in the spiritual life? Short answer– Not.At.All! It is the exact same **principle**, as attested by St. Paul in the scripture quoted above. Athletes train their bodies to perform at the optimal level. What are we doing to **train our souls** to operate at its maximum capacity. I recall when a theologian described the difference experienced by the saints in heaven. A soul in heaven experiences the **fullness** of God’s love according to its **capacity**. Some like Mother Teresa may have a “bucket” filled with God’s grace. The rest of us might be more akin to a **thimble**. Remember those? All souls will be satisfied, just not to the **same degree** as one whose capacity for receiving love was far greater. If we desire to increase the capacity of our souls, we need to perform daily spiritual exercises.

We cannot sit idly by and think that God’s grace **magically** does all the work. His greatest desire is for **us** to desire Him more and more. And to do that, we must work. And that means **developing**

habits. In more than 40 years since entering the seminary, I have learned the hard way that developing a habit of prayer, a daily *horarium* is essential. The word **horarium** comes from the Latin, meaning “**the hours**” and refers to a specific **daily schedule** of prayer. King David knew this centuries ago, even in his anguish: “At dusk, dawn, and noon I will grieve and complain, and my prayer will be heard.” (Ps 55:18) I make special mention of dawn! Dawn is **earlier** than Sunrise. On Sunday October 2, full darkness ends at 5:32 a.m., and Nautical Twilight (i.e., light) **begins** precisely at **6:09 a.m.** If you take King David’s routine seriously, try to emulate him and offer prayers sometime at **first light**, again at lunch and once more before you retire.

Thrice daily may be a challenge, but it’s not an unreasonable goal. The prayers may be brief or more extended meditations on the daily readings. The USCCB website has a [handy link](#) to the daily readings. Just click, read and pray. Just as athletes **train** their bodies, so too we train our **souls**. If you poised to do **both**, then you are really ahead of the game. Developing this routine does not have to be **monotonous**; in fact, it is freeing. Here is my final challenge for this column. Set your alarm **fifteen minutes earlier** for Monday. **Just try it**– use that time for prayer, whether before or after coffee. At the risk of scandalizing you, I am a “coffee **before** prayer” kind of guy! Sorry! Grumble at me if you will, but you’ll be amazed. Who knows, you might even thank me!

- The [National Association of Fraternal Insurance Counselors](#) convention was in town last week. On Thursday, we welcomed 150 people for the 7:30 a.m. Mass, the Feast of the Archangels. Our staff did a run through in preparation–checking for **loose extension cords** lying around, any rugs with **curled up** edges, **wet** spots on the **marble** floor, even gasoline-soaked rags in the wastepaper basket– y’know, just the **usual**. We did not want to distract any of our guests from concentrating on Mass. J
- If only! What a **disappointing** year. The **Twins** faded faster than the June peonies in the scorching heat. They were 47-39 when **Byron Buxton** was in their starting lineup. That’s **winning 55%** of games. As of Monday, the Twins are 27-40 when Buxton is out of the lineup. That’s just 40%. Moral of the story–your stars must stay healthy!
- This Wednesday marks 75 years since **President Harry Truman’s** televised speech to the nation, the first ever by a U.S. President. Television was still in its infancy. There were only about 44,000 television sets in U.S. homes, (mostly in major cities), compared with **40 million** radios. Five days earlier saw the first **World Series** telecast between the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers, **Jackie Robinson’s** rookie year. The Yankees won the series 4 games to 3.
- The **personal stories** of those in our RCIA program are **fascinating**. Many things draw people of all backgrounds and life experiences to consider entering the Church. Please **pray** for all those considering becoming Catholic. We are excited to welcome them in our midst.
- Calling all men and women! It has been heartening to welcome the presence of our **new** lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. I am especially pleased to see more young adults answering the call. We are in need of **additional ushers** too. Please consider serving the parish in this capacity.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector