

## *SPORT IS FOR MAN*

Pope Francis cited the dangers in the “throwaway culture” as an intrinsic evil. Human lives are seen as disposable. When a sportsman’s career is in its final stages our societies and cultures move away from athletes as their physical abilities naturally diminish. This “throw away society” results in the sportsman losing his feeling of self worth and humanity. The adoration of his skills and celebrity are gone, both privately and publicly the enterprise and corporate driven endorsements motivated by egoism and self-interest for the athlete are also gone. The sportsman is tossed aside. In July at the international economics seminar His Holiness Pope Francis used the example of wine being transformed into brandy as it passes through an organizational still. He stated, “ It is no longer wine but something else.” Perhaps this is our answer, the athlete transforms into something or someone greater to society. We as educators, sport leaders, pastoral directors, and organizations, need to consider a change in our academic programs adding majors in coaching, and leadership for the future of this phenomenal platform of sport and society. Within sport teams globally, the human and public relations departments in all sports have the availability to sustain these future goals for the athletes and the resources to educate and prepare our athletes and their families for the end of (as I see it )the first phase of this winemaking Pope Francis speaks about. Change our academic programs, and thought process for the future by making available the resources to establish nonprofit

foundations to serve the poor or committing to a cause the retired sportsman can continue to thrive and serve humanity and society. But mostly to set the example for the next generation and beyond. There is power and authority in a sportsman contract. Educate the athlete to for example including in contracts they must be provided pastoral care during in season play. With this brings multiplication of faith in sport.

Pope Francis referring to the thrown away society stated “a whole generation of young people are being thrown away and this is very grave.”

Psalm 143 begins

Teach me to do your will,

For you are my God,

May your good spirit lead me on level ground

Before any ball is kicked off, first baseball pitch thrown from the pitchers mound, basketball tipped off, or a hockey face off, the playing field is level. At least in the spiritual realm, there are no home field advantages or unfair play, for in the game of sport as in life it is the spiritual world that battles for our athletes and there we find the ground leveled through our faith. Mentoring, emphasizing the importance for athletes to set their sights on heaven where Christ sits in the place of honor, not the world cup or super bowl. Furthermore, when their life is revealed they share in all the real glory.

The Church gives us a new way to be human, we are offered a new way of living we can transcend human nature, a new humanity, and a divine

nature. In the Epistle of St Paul he puts the ball straight in our court. He states, "Have you been raised with Christ or not? The straightforwardness of St Paul's words resounds to the competitive spirit of today's athlete. With all the smartphones, twitter, facebook, instagram and media at the speed of light is their world, these athletes need and actually are hungry for a straight forward in your face encounter with God. A God that speaks of competition as in Isaiah 55 "My thoughts are your thoughts and my ways are, far beyond anything you could imagine, for just as the heavens are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. "

I have been in the sport world in different capacities for 34 years, these verses shout a competitive spirit. Making it real. God's love and power pour out through these words.

Living the fullness of the Church's identity, evangelizing, mentoring, discipleship, striving for something bigger than to transcend the activity of sport on the field. One of our athletic missionaries with FOCUS Varsity Athletes in the United States was having difficulty reaching the athletes and coaches on campus to begin her work as a missionary. She overheard one of them talking about a Tai Chi class, so she signed up. She was the worst in the class but because she was willing to step out of her comfort zone to mentor athletes, she did not care her skills were not to par, but she sustained and earned the trust and love from the athletes by doing what they loved to do in their time and space. This is discipleship and this is evangelization of athletes with

straight fundamental values. A true testimony of Pope Francis' "Smelling the Sheep".

Speaking with young athletes on campuses and married 30 years to my husband Jack whom was a Professional Football and now coach on the Denver Broncos Football team, our son Luke , a quarterback on scholarship at Oregon State University, and 3 of our daughters played at a high level of sport in high school. I witness the easy entrapment of the invincible persona that engulfs players when all is going well. The public and fans view you differently and have a nonrealistic view of your life. This worldview does not embrace that we are servants to the same God. Our joys and sufferings are the same but magnified in the public eye. My son once said "mom when we are winning its so easy to backslide, we all have freewill, but the tradeoff of the feeling when evil wins in your sport, academic and social life is never worth it". Our youth should never lose as Emeritus Pope Benedict calls the "rythmn of the love story of God with man". We are losing the ability to contemplate and listen to creation, the way God intended us to through His love for all of us where we are, and exactly who we are. The secular media will always spin the worst case scenario on our athletes lives, this council knows that Jesus' yoke is easy and the burden is light, and we can agree that athletes should live in wide open spaces of grace and not the fear of a dark society of believing that death is not a part of eternal life. Let us continue to fight the good fight of this "throwaway society"

the final verses of of Psalm 143 read

For your names sake, Lord preserve my life  
In your righteousness, bring me out of trouble,  
In your unfailing love, silence my enemies,  
Destroy all my foes,  
For I am your servant.

The perfect analogy of the soul for "Sport is Man"

Linda Del Rio

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