

Run the race

14 8 16

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray
and give more than we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid
and giving us those good things
which we are not worthy to ask
but through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.

Our text today may be found in the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12 and verse 1:

'Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.'

Well, the Olympics in Rio are in the second week and is it really four years ago since the London Games? Do you like sport? Do you like watching young people in form achieving such impressive feats of fitness, speed, endurance, effort and skill? When I was a boy at school, I played my year's rugby team, ran in the Junior then Senior cross country teams and competed in athletics. Now, I was not the biggest or strongest or most enthusiastic boy in my year but it was fun taking part, being part of something bigger than myself. And, today, the writer to the Hebrews challenges us with a picture of the Christian life as a race to be run.

Is that an image that has resonance for you ? ‘Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.’ Paul, in his letter to the Romans, rightly affirms that salvation is a matter of grace but James, in his single Epistle, clearly points out that if our faith is real, then it will produce, should produce, good works. Salvation is freely available but if we are saved, then we should live a life informed by grace that makes us make every effort to do our best to mirror God’s love to those we meet.

The image of Greek athletes exercising in the Gymnasium and competing in races must have been something with which Paul of Tarsus would have been familiar and, on his missionary journeys, it must have been something that Paul would have seen. In his First Letter to the church at Corinth, Paul writes in chapter 9 and verse 24 onwards – ‘Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete but only one receives the prize ? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it so that proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.’ Paul presents us with an image of discipline and focused effort. He holds up the example of an athlete, of a boxer, competing for a prize, the victor’s laurel crown, a reward that does not last but as Christians, the crown we are seeking, living the authentic Christian life, has a reward that lasts for ever – life eternal.

We have before us in the Olympic games the sight and sound of sportsmen and sportswomen who are at the peak of fitness and skill. They did not achieve such

high standards without commitment, time and effort, focused determination to do their very best because they believe that what they are doing is worth it. With such an example before us should we not try our best to be the best Christians we can be ?

‘Mens sana in sano corpore.’

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 34 :Run the race

