

WHY WOULD CATHOLICS CARE ABOUT SPORTS?



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REV. PATRICK KELLY, S.J., TELLS THE STORY OF HOW POPE FRANCIS, IN A SPEECH TO FELLOW CARDINALS BEFORE HE WAS ELECTED TO THE PAPACY, RECALLED THE STORY IN REVELATION WHERE JESUS SAYS, "BEHOLD I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK." BUT POPE FRANCIS ASKED HIS FELLOW CARDINALS TO ENVISION A DIFFERENT IMAGE — NOT OF CHRIST ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH DOORS KNOCKING TO GET IN, BUT RATHER CHRIST INSIDE THE CHURCH, KNOCKING ON THE DOORS WANTING TO GET OUTSIDE INTO THE WORLD TO BE WITH PEOPLE WHERE THEY LIVED THEIR LIVES.⁽¹⁾

Sports are an important element of American culture, and one only has to look at fields and gyms to note the large number of families and their children engaged in sports. Pope Francis asks us to be Christ-like and in the world where people live their lives — which in some cases is in the gym or on the fields of play.

In *Giving the Best of Yourself*, the Vatican has issued what

many are calling its' first official document on sports. God asks us to give the very best of ourselves, which is what sports asks us to do as well. Sports is an important activity in society that can be an instrument of self-actualization of the entire person — body, mind and soul.

Pope Francis called sports a "catalyst for experiences of community" and a "formative vehicle" of the human family.

The Church has a long history of recognizing the importance of sports, as sports and games were central elements of "feast day" celebrations as far back as the Middle Ages.

By issuing *Giving the Best of Yourself*, the Vatican is asking lay people to engage in sports with a Christian attitude — that our focus should be on encouraging the development of every child so that they become what God has called them to be. Sports should provide a joyful sense of community, and not an experience of isolation or diminishment.

The magisterium continually refers to the need to promote a "sport of the person" that gives meaning to life and fully develops a person. The Church reminds us the fullest development of the person — morally, ethically and spiritually — is centered in a life grounded

in the Eucharist.

As I visit parishes on weekends to watch games and meet coaches and coordinators, I see wonderful examples of this Christian attitude towards sports. What a wonderful influence when priests and religious are in attendance — working the clock, shooting baskets with the children or talking with parents. These instances of Christian attitude occur much more frequently than we are lead to believe. CYO thanks all the priests and religious for their prayers, support and presence.

The parallels of sports and faith is as old as the Church itself. St. Paul called us to keep our eye on the ultimate prize — eternal life: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus." (Heb 12:3) †



"Ever this day, be at my side ..."

Office for the Protection of Children and Young People - Diocese of Rockville Centre

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