



The Eucharist drives NFL quarterback Philip Rivers to begin again and again

"Once I've received the Eucharist, then I am prepared to go out and play."

Philip Rivers, NFL quarterback

With the NFL season in full swing, our Apostolic Athlete this month is Philip Rivers, quarterback for the Los Angeles Chargers. Rivers is a devout Catholic and has been influenced by the intercession of St. Sebastian at various points in his life. Rivers wears a medal of St. Sebastian, along with a miraculous medal and a crucifix.

The communion of saints is alive and well for those who wish to access this repository of faith and courage for the challenges we face in our own lives.

Rivers was born on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception to parents who were converts to the Catholic faith. Raised in Alabama, Rivers was an exceptional quarterback at North Carolina State University. He has played his entire professional career with the Chargers, and San Diego is home for him and his wife, Tiffany, and their eight children.

In his commencement address at The Catholic University in 2014, Rivers talked about *Nunc Coepi*, which is Latin for "Now I Begin." The concept was so important to Rivers and the Chargers that he and his teammates wore T-shirts emblazoned with their adopted phrase *Nunc Coepi*.

Rivers believes "Now I Begin" is applicable to every aspect of our lives, and easily observed in sports. After

every play, the team begins again. When the team succeeds at a play, they begin again; and when they fail, they must lift themselves up and begin again.

Sports requires long hours of preparation and hard work. There is a repetition to drills as they strive to be better. Discipline is needed to overcome failure and get up off the ground after being knocked down. Now I Begin. *Nunc Coepi*.

Rivers would tell you that the same is true of our faith. Every day is an opportunity to say "Now I Begin." Now I Begin to pray the Rosary. Now I Begin to attend Mass. Now I Begin to serve the poor. Now I Begin to be a better Catholic. Rivers puts the same long hours of preparation and hard work into his Catholic faith as he does his football career. "Now I Begin ..."

Most of us are familiar with the story of St. Sebastian. He was a Roman soldier who preached his Christian faith among fellow soldiers and countrymen. He did so quietly and proudly, as the punishment for preaching his faith was death.

The Emperor Diocletian eventually learned of Sebastian's preaching, and had him punished by death. Sebastian's fellow Roman soldiers shot him with arrows until they left him for dead.

But Sebastian did not die! He was nursed back to health by St. Irene. Having fully recovered, Sebastian said, "Now I Begin ..."

Now I Begin to preach the Gospel. Now I Begin to convert my fellow soldiers and countrymen. Now I Begin to live the life I was called to. For Sebastian, that meant, "Now I Begin" to convert Diocletian, who tried to kill him.

Sebastian went to speak the power of his faith and warn Diocletian about his sinful life. Diocletian wanted nothing of Sebastian and his faith and made sure he did not fail in his second attempt to kill Sebastian.

In a January 20, 2012, article in the *National Catholic Register*, Rivers tells the story of tearing his ACL in a 2008 playoff game. He was told he would not play in the next playoff game.

In a conversation with his mother, he expressed how disappointed he was to sustain a season-ending injury. Rivers' mother told him that his next game was January 20 — the Feast of St. Sebastian — and he should pray to the saint.

Ever the prayerful man, Rivers did just that. Rivers played that Sunday in the playoff game and credits the intercession of St. Sebastian.

The grace of the communion of saints is all around us and can be a source of strength. Rivers attends Mass every Sunday and never steps on the field without first receiving the Eucharist. *Nunc Coepi*. Now I Begin. Let us do the same. †



PAUL ECHAUSSE
is on the board of trustees of the Catholic Youth Organization of Nassau-Suffolk



Please contact me at paul@cyons.org if you have a story to share about CYO or an Apostolic Athlete or an Apostolic Coach or an idea for this column. You can follow CYO of Long Island on our Facebook page and on Twitter at @ApostlicAthlet