

One of the most overlooked and underappreciated events of the summer Olympic Games, which is soon to be held in the city of Tokyo, Japan, is the race walk, a relatively new entry in Olympic competition. The men's race is fifty kilometers or approximately thirty-one miles in length and the woman's race is twenty kilometers or approximately twelve miles in length. Americans generally have not fared well in this event in past Olympics. In America, a walking race is simply unappealing to most young people at the present time. Few, I suspect, compete for the honor of participating in this Olympic event. Interest in a walking event is far more popular in other countries.

Walking, however, is not without significance for all of humanity. Whenever we take a first step, we have a destination in mind. It may be our place of work or a house of worship. Wherever our destination, completing a walk is a daily exercise.

What all races have in common is a starting and finish line. The first to cross the finish line is the winner of the race. As members of the household of God and disciples of Jesus, Christians are fully aware that they have come from somewhere and they have some place to go. Life has a destination, a finish line. We are pilgrims on a journey to our eternal destiny, heaven.

So we walk!

It is rather striking that there are so many references to walking in Sacred Scripture. Walking is an analogy for the path of our lives from conception to death. In one of Saint Paul's letters he writes, "This is how we are to know him: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did". We follow the Good Shepherd to wherever he leads us. The words of the Psalmist comes to mind "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me".

In words dating back to the Middle Ages, a notable scholar writes, "If you do not travel with the king whom you seek, you will not find him at the end of your journey".

The unsuspecting men walking on the road to Emmaus on the evening of Our Lord's Resurrection found themselves walking in the company of an unrecognized stranger, who just happened to be Jesus Christ.

They were not alone! Christ accompanied them on their journey of faith.

Although Oscar Hammerstein II, an accomplished lyricist was not a man of faith, the song he wrote in collaboration with Richard Rodgers, "You'll Never Walk Alone", has nevertheless inspired so many of the Christian faithful. Consider the words of the song: "When you walk through a storm, keep your head on high and don't be afraid of the dark" and "Walk on, walk on, with hopes in your heart, and you'll never walk alone; you'll never walk alone".

For our deceased brother, Tom, the race has ended. It is time for rest. He has completed the mission entrusted to him by Christ himself.

Having reached the finish line exhausted, let us pray that our merciful Lord grant our brother eternal rest, and that when our race is completed, we may be reunited with him in the place of our destination, the Kingdom of Heaven.