

Homily – 31st Sunday of Year B - November 4th 2018

At this hour, tens of thousands of people (50K plus) are getting preparing to run the New York City Marathon. It's a 26 mile grueling event. It takes a lot of training and stamina to compete in this contest. And, at this hour also, millions of people all over the world are hearing the exact same words of Jesus (the same old words – the same old message) that to “win” the marathon of life one has to: “love God above all else and to love our neighbors as ourselves.” In reality, it takes even more training and more stamina to keep on loving (and living a faith-filled life) than it does to win a marathon race.

I'd like to suggest in this homily that the New York City Marathon (any “marathon” actually) is a wonderful paradigm of life itself – and love. I'd like to suggest that we reflect upon TEN connections between a marathon and living a faithful life of love. See if you agree that the marathon is an image of life and love with these TEN CONNECTIONS:

1. The marathon has a GOAL, a FINISH LINE – Central Park! So do we! The goal of life is heaven, the salvation of our soul – everlasting union with God. The first question of the old *Baltimore Catechism* was: “WHY did God make me?” The answer: “God made me to know Him; to love Him and to serve Him in THIS world; and to be happy with Him forever in the next world.” This life, like a marathon, has a FINISH LINE – and a GOAL.
2. The marathon requires PRACTICE. Nobody runs it without a lot of preparation. The journey of life needs practice too - we have successes; we have failures. Sometimes we win; other times we lose – especially in the struggle with sin. We call ourselves “*practicing Catholics*” because to be faithful – requires a lot of PRACTICE.
3. The marathon is about PERSEVERANCE. It's not necessarily the fastest that win – but those who stick to it. So it is with our life. Jesus told us often that we have to persevere in our prayers; in our fidelity to him; and in our daily training of living out the greatest commandment – to love. PERSEVERANCE.
4. The marathon takes DISCIPLINE. To exercise, stay trim, keep in shape – isn't easy. So does our life of discipleship - it needs such rigor and constancy and a whole lot of work (aka – “discipline”). Jesus recommends fasting and self-sacrifice. DISCIPLINE.
5. COMPANY: The runners are aware that they're not running alone, but have the company of thousands of other competitors – all on the same road to the same finish line. So does the race of faith – **back** to God. We are part of a team, in communion with others – the Church! COMPANY, PARTNERSHIP. Or, as Pope Francis often says – we “accompany” one another!
6. The runners rely on the cheers and SUPPORT from the crowd. On the radio this morning, the reporter said that the NYPD expected a million spectators cheering the runners! In our marathon on the road of life back to God, we are encouraged by that “*crowd of witnesses*” – the Saints, the “Church Triumphant” – cheering us on from heaven, including our loved-ones from above. SUPPORT.
7. REBOUND: If a runner stumbles he/she gets back up again. So do we when we sin (or fail to love as we should) especially through the sacrament of Penance. We press the “refresh” button, restart our efforts and REBOUND.
8. CHARITY: Along the race, there are those who help the ones in need. It might be a cup of water, a towel, a bandage if one is hurt, or even a professional, if someone's in distress. So to on the marathon of life and love, we need helpers for the weak, the afflicted, and the hurt. That's CHARITY.

9. **STAY ON COURSE:** The competitors have to stay “ON THE COURSE” or else they’ll be disqualified. They can’t start running over the Verrazano Bridge, get to the Brooklyn side and then hop on a subway to the Central Park area and resume running. You stay the course – or, you’re out! So does Jesus instruct us to: “Take up the cross (your particular *course*) and follow in my footsteps.” He gives us the **boundaries** of his **teachings** as our **road map** for life and love. **STAY ON COURSE.**
10. **REWARD:** Those who reach the finish line get a **REWARD** or their names in the paper. So do we. But, as St. Paul remarked, ours is hardly a laurel that will fade or a trophy that will tarnish – but everlasting glory. As we heard in the All Saint’s Day Gospel – “Your reward in heaven will be great.”

I can only hope that I’ll do better in the journey of Christian life and loving others than I ever would running a marathon.

The first and greatest of all the Commandments is to love. As we make the efforts to “run” the marathon of life and live the greatest commandment of love, let’s work at making sure that (like the Good Scribe in the Gospel), we find ourselves: “*Not too far (off course) from the Kingdom of God.*”