

Dear friends in Christ,
 During these beautiful weeks of Summer, I want to invite us to get to know our new Pope, Pope Leo XIV. Over these weeks, while I am away on vacation. I am sharing some excerpts from homilies which he has given over the last number of weeks. Today, I offer some portions of his homily for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity which was also the occasion of the Jubilee Mass for Sports:

*Dear brothers and sisters,
 In the first reading we heard these words: “Thus says the wisdom of God: The Lord possessed me, the beginning of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago ... When the Lord established the heavens I was there ... then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of his earth; and I found delight in the human race” (Prov 8: 22, 27, 30-31) For Saint Augustine, the Trinity and wisdom are intimately connected. Divine wisdom is revealed in the Most Holy Trinity, and wisdom always leads us to truth.*

While we are celebrating today the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we are also marking the Jubilee of Sport. This combination of Trinity and Sport is somewhat unusual, yet the juxtaposition is not inappropriate. Every good and worthwhile human activity is in some way a reflection of God’s infinite beauty, and sport is certainly one of these. For God is not immobile and closed in on himself, but activity, communion, a dynamic relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which opens up to humanity and to the world. Theologians speak of perichoresis: the life of God is a kind of “dance”: a dance of mutual love.

This dynamism of God’s inner life gives birth to life. We were created by a God who finds joy in giving existence to his creatures, who “delights” in our world, as the we heard in the first reading (cf. Prov 8:30-31). Some Fathers of the Church go so far as to speak of a Deus ludens, a God who “plays” (cf. SAINT SALONIUS OF GENEVA, In Parabolas Salomonis expositio mystica; SAINT GREGORY NAZIANZEN, Carmina, I, 2, 589). Sport can thus help us to encounter the Triune God, because it challenges us to relate to others and with others, not only outwardly but also, and above all, interiorly. Otherwise, sport becomes nothing more than an empty competition of inflated egos.

Here in Italy, spectators at sporting events often cheer athletes on by shouting out, “Dai!” (Come on!). The Italian word, however, means, literally, “Give!” This can give us cause to reflect. Sports are not only about physical achievements, however extraordinary, but also about giving of ourselves, putting ourselves “in play”. It is about

giving of ourselves for others – for our personal improvement, for our athletic supporters, for our loved ones, our coaches and colleagues, for the greater public, and even for our opponents. Being a “good sport” is more important than winning or not. Saint John Paul II – himself, as we know, a sportsman – put it this way: “Sport is joy of life, a game, a celebration. As such, it must be fostered... by recovering its sheer gratuity, its ability to forge bonds of friendship, to encourage dialogue and openness towards others... quite apart from the harsh laws of production and consumption and all other purely utilitarian and hedonistic approaches to life” (Homily for the Jubilee of Sports, 12 April 1984).

From this standpoint, let us reflect on three particular things that make sport, nowadays, a precious means for training in human and Christian virtues.

First, in a society marked by solitude, where radical individualism has shifted the emphasis from “us” to “me”, resulting in a deficit of real concern for others, sport – especially team sports – teaches the value of cooperating, working together and sharing. These, as we said, are at the very heart of God’s own life (cf. Jn 16:14-15). Sport can thus become an important means of reconciliation and encounter: between peoples and within communities, schools, workplaces and families.

Second, in an increasingly digital society, where technology brings distant people closer together, yet often creates distances between those who are physically close, sport proves a valuable and concrete means of bringing individuals together, providing a healthier sense of the body, of space, effort and real time. It counters the temptation to escape into virtual worlds and it helps to preserve a healthy contact with nature and with real life, where genuine love is experienced (cf. 1 Jn 3:18).

Third, in our competitive society, where it seems that only the strong and winners deserve to live, sport also teaches us how to lose. It forces us, in learning the art of losing, to confront one of the deepest truths of our human condition: our fragility, our limitations and our imperfections. This is important, because it is through the experience of these limits that we open our hearts to hope. Athletes who never make mistakes, who never lose, do not exist. Champions are not perfectly functioning machines, but real men and women, who, when they fall, find the courage to get back on their feet. Saint John Paul II hit the mark when he said that Jesus is “the true athlete of God” because he defeated the world not by strength, but by the fidelity of love (cf. Homily at the Mass for the Jubilee of Sportsmen and Sportswomen, 29 October 2000)... **POPE LEO XIV**

Blessings on your week!
 Fr. Johnson