

Issue No. 2: October 4, 2020

What: Weekly Catholic Athletes for Christ message

Why: To keep our faith & athletics intersected

Who: Any member of any sports team in our Catholic High Schools across the Diocese

From: Fr. Zach Edgar, Diocesan CAC Chaplain

Rather listen than read?

- audio available at: <https://tinyurl.com/CAC20-CR2>

GREETINGS, RAIDERS!

Reminder from last week: While we're dealing with modified sports seasons, etc., I would like to try to do something small each week to help you stay plugged into your faith. I know I like audio more than reading, so feel freed to download my brief chat this week from my Catholic Radio SoundCloud, if you'd rather listen vs. read. The link for that is above and also in the email I sent your school admins. I have one real goal in this: to stay focused on **living concrete virtues in your day-to-day life** and using the upcoming Sunday readings as a roadmap to do it. I also like puns, hence, "Cross-Road" as we try to keep our athletic endeavors intersecting with and rooted in our Catholic faith. Since Mass is the most amazing and important thing we can participate in this side of heaven, I'm hoping a few one-liners from the coming Sunday readings help you pray better when you're at Mass on Sunday.

This week we celebrate the feast days of the Archangels (9/29) and Guardian Angels (10/2), So let's ask for extra spiritual protection from St. Michael:

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

This Sunday is: 27th in Ordinary Time

Our focus is on: the spiritual quality of **Fruitfulness**, which is the medicine for when we feel spiritually "stuck."

This Sunday, we hear a call to bear good fruit by being "rooted" in God, the *vine*.

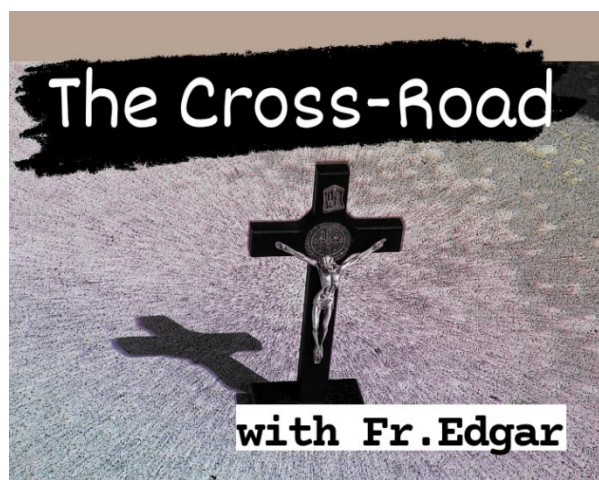
It's easy to get "stuck" or "in a rut" in life,

especially in our spiritual life where we feel like we are not seeing "results" in the time or in the quantity we expected to see them.

Sometimes our spiritual growth gets stunted because we haven't gotten out of the Lord's way and told Him in prayer we want His help. We get a great reminder from St. Paul this Sunday in his letter to the Philippians, on how to pray for any need: *Have **no anxiety** at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with **thanksgiving**, make your requests known to God.*

Asking for help from others can be a big hurdle for many of us. If we struggle to do this with each other, it **does** effect our willingness to ask God for His help as well, and we run the risk of quickly becoming overly self-sufficient. When we start to think that we are taking care of ourselves, rather than seeing every single good thing in our life as a total gift from God, we risk becoming spiritually blind or stunted from spiritual growth. We'll never do any better than what we're already doing, if not moving backwards.

It's the same in sports: some of my best moments helping coach high school baseball were when I had an idea to tweak a drill in practice or in the batting cage that put a particular athlete out of their comfort zone, and thereby out of control in that particular situation. I remember throwing live batting practice over the inside part of the plate to one particular outfielder to help him get over a mental block he had about swinging at, or even trying to foul off, inside pitches. And I did that over and over and



over until that obstacle was gone. He was stuck, he wanted help, and so I did my best to come up with something that would get him out of that rut.

There are constant reminders every day that, truly, apart from God, without His help, we can do **nothing**. When we choose to go our own way, there are naturally consequences, and sometimes we seem to have to learn things the hard way, but God still loves us and will give us occasions for humility and for turning around - back towards Him.

In Sunday's first reading from the Prophet Isaiah we hear the vineyard owner, who represents God ruling over the people of the house of Israel ask, *'Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did [my vines] bring forth wild grapes?'*

Not every path leads to fruitfulness. To bear fruit, we have to ask for God's help daily to keep our spiritual senses open to Him. There's a prayer of surrender that I love which has the lines:

Let me speak, Lord, only with Your voice... Keep me weak, that You might be my strength,

Keep me blind, that I might see only through Your eyes; Keep me deaf to the world, that I might hear only You...

When we decide to surrender and bear fruit *for* God, and give everything we do meaning because we see it's God giving us another day, and He's allowing us to do His will in the first place, we can pray sincerely the words we'll hear this Sunday in Psalm 80: *"take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted... Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us **new** life, and we will call upon your name."*

We call on the Lord and we call on the people we trust for help, and when we do that we are setting ourselves up for success. When we ignore help when we really need it, things can go south quickly. Jesus directly warns the chief priests and the elders of Israel in Sunday's Gospel what will happen if we **consistently** ignore the call from God to bear fruit for Him: **"the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."** - Or as my high school baseball coach would say if we weren't hustling, "I've got subs, and I know how to use them."

If **you** feel stuck in any part of your life, never, ever, ever give up. If we invite God back into our life, acknowledging we need His help, He can do great things with every single one of us. Every if you feel like your gifts are very small, He can magnify them to degrees higher than we could ever imagine, because He is doing the hard part for us. So **hear** the invitation this week from Him in prayer, **"Let me help you."** Let's give our full-hearted yes to that, no matter how difficult or inconvenient it may seem.

Lord, help us to bear fruit for you in the way that You desire!

Further reading:

Catechism paragraph #755: The Church is likened also to a cultivated field, the tillage of God, in which grows the ancient olive tree that is holy Israel, rooted in the prophets and now the locus of reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. That field is like a choice vineyard, planted by God himself. Yet the true vine is Christ, who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us who are in Christ, without whom we can do nothing (cf. John 15:5).

Resolution:

So practically, **how** do we be *fruitful*? Hindsight/perspective on our experiences helps us to learn lessons about what to do *and* what not to do next time. We know from experience that being united to something good is always better than isolation and turning in on oneself. Can you recall examples of both of those instances in your life? What did you learn from them? Can you look back and **thank** God for both of them, even the times that, in the moment, seemed only negative? Can you still **thank** Him for bringing you to where you are today? In silent prayer, try to recall one great team or group moment where you were a part of "unity" at its best. Resolve to **thank** God for those past "wins". Also recall a time of bearing a difficult cross, isolation, loneliness, etc., where God saw you through and now made you better for it. Resolve to **thank** Him also for the crosses and difficulties that have shaped you into a better person. **Thank** Him for what you've learned from the past "losses". Would you please do this mental prayer exercise in thanksgiving every day for the next week? Try it! I bet there's good fruit!

Finally, think of 10 different people or intentions that you know need prayers right now, and pray 10 Hail Mary's in a row, Chose a different intention for each Hail Mary. Let us pray for each other!

Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us!