

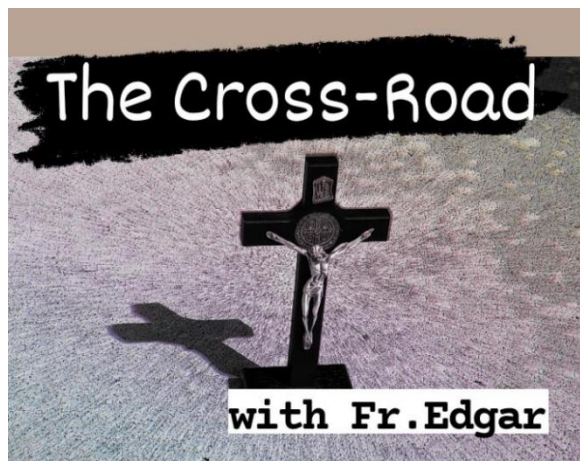
What: Weekly Catholic Athletes for Christ message
Why: To keep our faith & athletics intersected
Who: All Catholic High Schools across the Diocese
From: Fr. Zach Edgar, Diocesan CAC Chaplain

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GREETINGS, RAIDERS!

This weekend we celebrate All Saints Day. Everyone that is in heaven, worshipping God forever, is a saint! If and when we get to heaven, we'll be a saint too. That's why the Beatitudes are always the Gospel for this feast - because the best definition of being *Blessed* is to see God face-to-face. Those are the souls who are truly blessed! In our very own country this Saturday, an American priest, Fr. Michael McGivney, will be declared "Blessed" - that is *certainly* in heaven because of a miracle worked through his intercession. More on that below. Fr. McGivney died at age 38 in 1890 and is the founder of the Knights of Columbus. We congratulate all the staff and students of our own Fr. McGivney Catholic H.S. in Glen Carbon on the beatification of their school's patron this weekend in Connecticut. ***God help us say yes to the grace we need to be saints!***



Miracle for Fr. Michael McGivney's Beatification:

An unborn child was diagnosed with the usually fatal "*fetal hydrops*" where fluid builds up around the vital organs.

The diagnosing doctor had never seen a baby survive this in 30 years of work. The family asked for Fr. McGivney's intercession and the child was inexplicably born without a trace of this previously seen malformation in 2015.

Michael is now 5 and lives with his parents in Tennessee.

This Sunday is: All Saints Day

Our focus is on: the **Beatitudes** as our Roadmap to Heaven. (Mt 5:1-12)

How do we practically balance learning from the past, staying in the moment, and preparing for the future?

So many times in life, we can get stuck in our past instead of learning from it.

Dwelling on things we cannot change can have a damaging spiritual impact on both the present and the future. The gift of **hope** reminds us that God can bring good out of both tragedy and failure - and we don't have to look any further than **Good Friday** to see that's true. In moving forward in any athletic endeavor and in life in general, yes, we should use our memory in a positive way to remember where we came from, but we need to be willing to let go of whatever is in our past that could hold us back now.

Even in this pandemic there seem to be two camps of people, those constantly advocating that this is "the new normal" and those who want to do everything in their power to get back to "the way things were." I'm going to advocate that both those positions are short-sighted. First of all, do we really want to go back? No one's pulled that one off yet. Why not focus instead on trying to bring Christ into every time and place that will be a part of our future? Every moment of history is **unique**. Yes, there can be *similar* patterns throughout life, but re-creating the past is *absolutely impossible*. Chasing after that illusion will always leave us unsatisfied. In the same way, as we look forward, there is no "expert" on earth that has total certainty about anything in the future. The Christian way to pray about the future is precisely to say, Lord, I don't know what's ahead today, but I know I need Your help! That's smart preparation. Never go it alone in anything. God made us for community, not isolation. He sent us the Holy Spirit at Pentecost precisely to be with us always for the rest of the history of this world. The beautiful part of our baptism is that not only were we perfectly united to God in that moment, but also to everybody else that's baptized in heaven, purgatory, and on earth.

Pope St. John Paul II emphasized over and over again that holiness is **for everybody**, we are all called to it. The reason we were born is because God wants us to end up in heaven as saints. That's it. That's THE ultimate thing, living forever in heaven, when this earth is far, far in the past. How do we get to heaven? By being united to Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. How are we united to Him? The ordinary way He taught us was to be *baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28:19) and to *eat His Flesh and drink His Blood* in the Eucharist if we want to have *true life*

within us (Jn 6:53). The eight Beatitudes that we hear in Sunday's Gospel are rightly called our "roadmap to heaven." How do **we** become **blessed** and make it to heaven? By being poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure of heart, and so on. Psalm 24 for All Saints Day asked and answered this same question: "*Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord, or who may stand in his holy place? One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain.*" Climbing that mountain / getting to heaven is what God wanted for us from the moment we came into existence. As far as any of our priorities go, we have to ask ourselves, "How bad do I want it? Am I willing to let go of what's necessary so that nothing stands in God's way in my heart?" The Church teaches that "those who die in the grace of God and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ and see God face to face, as he is" (1 Jn 3.2, CCC #1023).

The only thing that will separate us from seeing God face to face is unrepentant mortal sin, it will not be arbitrary. We will either die with God's grace from our baptisms still alive in our hearts or we will have thrown it away through mortal sin. The soul that is unrepentant – meaning not sorry – chooses his or her separation from God because they've decided to make themselves their own authority on good and evil. We have all done this, we've been wrong to do it, our judgment clouded, pride making us blind – but God never gives up on us, he wants to show us the way to freedom in Him. That freedom is detachment, surrender, not to look back to what was, provided that we let His Mercy destroy the evil in our past, and to only look ahead – look up! – to the future, united to Him.

Blessed indeed are the poor in spirit, those who are detached from the "stuff" that keeps our spirit from being united to the Holy Spirit (who has everything we could ever truly "need"). We will not understand how to accept or give mercy without the very first beatitude, our first step towards life with God: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Every Pentecost Sunday we pray an ancient prayer before the Gospel called the Pentecost Sequence which, in part, says: Come, O Father of the Poor! Come, O Giver of every good gift! Come, enlighten our hearts! If His light is where we want to live forever, it only makes sense to ask for that light of the Spirit to come to us and show us what's up everyday.

Jesus preaches the Beatitudes precisely to tell us what real happiness is, not some cheap counterfeit. We have a choice every day what attitude we are going to approach every part of our life with: Pride or Humility. Will we rely on him, or only on ourselves? Will we choose the path of least resistance, or *take up our cross everyday and follow* Jesus as a disciple (Lk 9:23) - one who is willing to learn from Him - He who is *meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29).

You don't have to be anywhere close to perfect right now to be a saint, or to even remotely have it all together, but do not be afraid to accept the challenge of spiritual growth which will always be connected to the Cross. That's where the most perfect love the world has ever seen was shown to us. That's the perfect love that God wants to *pour into our hearts* (Rom 5:5) to replace every sin of our past. God is infinite, He can't run out of that love! So there are no amount of sins that can't be destroyed and replaced by that grace of His love. **Lord, make us truly Blessed!**

Further Reading: CCC #2519 "The pure of heart are promised that they will see God face to face and be transformed to be like him (Mt 5.8). Purity of heart is the precondition for the vision of God. Even in this life, purity of heart enables us to see others as truly our neighbors and to see the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6.19)."

Meditation: Psalm 37 (*notice how the Beatitudes echo this passage*)

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not envy those who do evil: for they wither quickly like grass and fade like the green of the fields. If you trust in the Lord and do good, you will live in the land and dwell secure. If you find your delight in the Lord, he will grant your heart's desire. Commit your life to the Lord, trust in Him and He will act, so that your justice breaks forth like the light, your cause like the noon-day sun. Be still before the Lord and wait in patience; do not fret at the man who prospers; a man who makes evil plots to bring down the needy and the poor. Calm your anger and forget your rage; do not fret, it only leads to evil. For those who do evil shall perish; but the patient shall inherit the land.

Our Lady, Queen of All Saints, pray for us! Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney, pray for us!