

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)

August 19, 2007

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Psalm 82

Hebrews 11:29—12:2

Luke 12:49-56

Where's your baton?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us....”

(Hebrews 12:1, *NRSV*)

Have you ever watched a race involving a relay team? I am intrigued how everyone on the team, when they receive the baton, drops everything and takes off running.

Sports were of immense social and cultural significance in antiquity. They even played an important role in many religious festivals. The earliest Olympic Games included four types of races, each of varying lengths and difficulty. The *stadion* was the oldest of the races. In this race, runners were required to sprint the length of the stadium (192 meters). Another race required competitors to run the length of two stadiums, and the long distance race could range from seven to twenty-four stadiums.

Versions of these races still exist in the modern Games. But the Greeks also had a race unlike anything in the modern Olympics: a race that was two to four stadiums in length in which the athletes ran in full armor. A standard set of armor weighed nearly sixty pounds. Can you imagine running nearly half-a-mile as fast as you can with sixty pounds of forged metal hanging off your body? Clearly, this particular race was about strength and endurance. The writer of Hebrews is aware that, in similar fashion, many things can weigh us down and prevent us from keeping the pace necessary to finish our Christian race victoriously.

In today's reading, the writer has just finished recounting an honor roll of men and women who, motivated by faith, acted boldly and accomplished great things for God. They persevered despite the hindrances they encountered while running, and the writer of Hebrews offers us their track record as encouragement to persevere. “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...let us run...”

In the ancient Games, just as now, it was considered a great honor to represent one's country and people in competition. The challenge far outweighed the strength and

endurance that was required. And, the prize symbolized more than the olive wreath that was awarded. Think about whom it is that we represent when we run the race of Christian perseverance. Think about the prize that we strive for. We do not run for ourselves. And more importantly, we do not run in our own strength.

The Scriptures say we run fueled and powered by Jesus, who “is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2a, *NRSV*). And, as we run, all those who have gone before us, including Jesus himself, our champion, cheer us onward.

Are you in the Christian race? Then, drop everything. Grab the baton, let the chorus of adulation ring in your ears, focus on Jesus and *run*.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Scott S. Elliott who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Translations Officer in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship. Mr. Elliott (ABD) is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in New Testament and Early Christianity at The Theological School at Drew University, Madison, NJ.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Swaziland – With thanks to God for the positive impact of the *Good Samaritan* HIV/AIDS prevention program and the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program, and with prayers for fundraising opportunities in connection with the 10th anniversary of the Siswati Bible; **South Africa** – With thanks to God for the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program, for the 150th anniversary of the Tswana Bible, and for the centenary of the Tsonga Bible, and with prayers for the launch of the Afrikaans Bible for the Deaf, for the Southern Ndebele translation project, and for new translations of the Bible in Afrikaans and Zulu; **Lesotho** – With thanks to God for the successful launch of literacy books for shepherds, and with prayers to produce a camouflage Bible for soldiers, for efforts to distribute Scriptures to those affected by HIV/AIDS, and for peace and stability during this year’s general elections in Lesotho.

Activity Corner: “Run for Jesus” Race

Supplies needed: Whistle, similar small prizes (enough for each participant), 8 1/2 x 11” sheets of paper, markers or crayons, safety/latch pins, a skein of yarn.

Write the same number on two sheets of paper with the marker or crayon. Pin this number with safety pins on the front and back of the shirt of a runner. Continue to outfit runners in this way, with each runner having a different number. Determine the start and finish lines. Cut off enough yarn so that it is wider than the track the runners will use. Have two people hold either ends of the yarn across the finish line. Have someone distribute one small prize to each participant at the end of the race. In a “Run for Jesus” Race, everyone is a winner. At the start of the race, one person will blow the whistle to start the runners off. The bystanders can chant or shout in unison, “Run for Jesus, run!”