

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17)
September 2, 2007

Proverbs 25:6-7 (or Sirach 10:12-18)
Psalm 112
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
Luke 14:1, 7-14

On Your Mark!

Millions of people around the world enjoy watching the Olympic Games when they are held in designated cities around the world. And it is no wonder. The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat – these are experiences that resonate with us all. While few of us will ever compete for medals or records, we are all faced with challenges and obstacles that, to us, feel just as urgent. In the day-to-day “races” of our lives, we, too, often need to know just how we measure up. And sometimes, we may even find ourselves looking over our shoulders, just to make sure there are others trailing behind us and we are ahead of the game.

But there is no easier way to fail. The first thing, in fact, a sprinter learns is that one should *never* look back. Turning the head alters the stride, drains momentum, and eventually slows everything down. The same can be said in terms of a spiritual journey. “We must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially the sin that just won’t let go. And we must be determined to run the race that is ahead of us. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete” (Hebrews 12:1b, 2a, *CEV*).

Our attempts to define or validate ourselves *in comparison* to others are therefore misguided distractions. What’s worse, they demonstrate a lack of faith. When an inexperienced runner whips his head around to scan the field, it usually indicates insecurity. This is not the message we want to send about our faith. So how is it that we are to measure ourselves and the progress in our lives? For guidance, we should consider what Jesus said to a group of dinner guests he found vying for the best seats:

“When you are invited to be a guest, go and sit in the worst place. Then the one who invited you may come and say, ‘My friend, take a better seat!’ You will then be honored in front of all the other guests. If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored” (Luke 14:10-11, *CEV*). Ultimately, we should be humble – less concerned with *earning the best place*, than with *knowing our place* – the special purpose God has for each of us.

And in order to truly keep pace with God's plan, we need to be dedicated to putting our neighbors ahead of ourselves. The failures, difficulties, and weaknesses of our neighbors do not raise our standing with God; we are not vaulted into God's favor when others fall. What truly determines our progress is how we respond in Christian love to the needs of those around us.

We can make our journey with God an all-out sprint, but only if we do it together. The Bible exhorts us to "keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should" (Hebrews 13:1, *CEV*). So we must be willing to pull our friends and neighbors into the lead with us. "Don't forget those who are suffering," the writer of Hebrews tells us, "but imagine you are there with them" (13:3b, *CEV*).

Our charge for this week is to remember that our race of faith is not a mad dash. It's a relay.

Now go!

This week's Reflection was prepared by Bryan M. Saunders who serves as Partnership Coordinator for the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science, an innovative institute serving grades 6-12, in the Bronx, New York.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Libya – With prayers for the many expatriate Christians in the country, and with prayers for political leaders and for peace; **Egypt** – With thanks to God for the completion of the Arabic Study New Testament and for the donation of land to be used for a central warehouse, and with prayers that children will encounter God's Word through the *Kingo* project and that plans to distribute 150,000 Children's Bibles will be successful; **Malta** – With thanks to God for the blessing of being able to launch new products, including the first Bible in Maltese Braille and that this Bible is bringing God's Word to visually impaired people in a language and format they can understand.

Activity Corner: "Get set! Go! Relay"

Supplies needed: Bible, at least 8 empty paper towel rolls, aluminum foil, colored chalk. Wrap the paper towel rolls with aluminum foil to make batons. Determine start and finish lines. Mark with the chalk, preferably on the sidewalk, or another safe area, three relay points (equal spaces between each) where the batons will be changed. Gather at least two teams (eight children/youth) for the race. Before starting, read together Hebrews 12:2a. At the end of the race, sing the chorus of "Faith is the Victory" or "Victory is Mine" or some other song that emphasizes reliance on Jesus.

