

Greeting to all the wonderful Saints at Manatee Life,

SCRIPTURE:

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (MSG) – Larger reading: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

“You’ve all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You’re after one that’s gold eternally.”

STORY:

Robert Stopford, one of Nelson’s commanders, after telling of many hardships and trials, exclaimed: “We were half-starved, and otherwise inconvenienced by long out of port. But our reward was – we were with Nelson.”

OBSERVATION:

Well, the World Series has started. Rays vs. Dodgers. With a score of 8 to 3 reality sunk in that our Tampa Bay Rays are now down 1 game in this 7 game series. Either the Rays or the Dodgers will win ... that is stating the obvious. What isn’t so obvious is how we relate to the situation if our team is on the winning side or on the losing side. It is all in the mind and spirit of the person involved and just how directly we actually do relate to the team involved.

Individuals who participated in sports of various kinds surrounded me as I grew up. My father played high school and college basketball, as well as teaching my oldest brother, Ronnie, how to play tennis. Ronnie, besides tennis, played pick-up games of hockey, ran track in high school and when he returned from his tour of duty in the Army, could play one mean game of ping-pong. Dale played golf and a lot of it. Todd, Dale’s son, played professional tennis and was ranked in the upper five for a number of years. Sports Illustrated said of Todd that he was “the best player who never won a major”. Ralph, the closest to my age, ran track in high school. As for me I played spectator fairly well!

Oh, there was a time that I was encouraged to go out for basketball by one of the Junior High School coaches ... that is, before he saw me play ... then he ask me if I had ever considered drama. His “kind” words simply reinforced that what I could do best was to be a spectator ... with enthusiasm ... when it came to sports! I took his “advice” to heart.

Living in Florida I cheer on all the Florida based teams. Dolphins, Buccaneers, Jaguars, Rays, Marlins, Lightning, U of M, U. of Florida, Florida State, UCF, USF ... you name it I am a fanatic spectator. Now, I do cheer them on in a particular order, especially when they are playing each other, but nevertheless I am on the sidelines, via the TV, cheering the various teams on. When they win I feel like a winner and when they lose ... well, that is another story isn’t it.

It is the “winner-takes-all” mind that grips our spirit. We all like to associate or identify with winners. NHRA Gatornationals is run every year in Gainesville, FL. If you like

speed then this is one of the drag car events that really should make it onto your “bucket list.” Just to be present when cars are reaching 280-plus miles per hour in a quarter mile is breathtaking. No matter how hard you try not to take sides, you do end up choosing sides as you try to pick a winner. You want to identify with a winner ... if by name only!

We all like winners! We all want to be winners! Even as spectators we like to be a winner and when our team, car, individual player wins ... well, so do we ... at least emotionally. That is a good thing ... that sense that for a split second we can share in the victory as witnessed by the various celebrations in the streets of the cities of the winning team or national pride when a person from your country wins a tennis or golf championship. We become winners. Yeah, team! Yeah, God?

Well, why not ... Yeah, God? We all cannot reach the level of professional sports nor, as I painfully experienced, even a level good enough to be picked in a local pick-up game at the neighborhood park. But, whatever we do – from playing the sport or by sitting in the stands to cheer our favorite team or individual on – we can do it with enthusiasm and commitment. And, isn't that all that is really required of us ... from those on the field of play or running the race or cheering in the stands ... to do it with gusto, acting from the heart, putting our entire energy at the disposal of our commitment. Yeah, God – thank you for your Spirit who frees my spirit to be enthusiastically spirit filled!

QUOTE:

“A winner works harder than a loser and has more time; a loser is always ‘too busy’ to do what is necessary.” - Source Unknown

PRAYER:

Holy God, help us to understand that the only thing that you really have asked to do is try, but to try with enthusiasm. To be our best at whatever we attempt to do for the King and his Kingdom! Yeah, God and Amen!

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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DON'T FORGET – this Sunday we are back in the sanctuary for in-person worship. Hope to see you then ... just make sure you follow the detailed guidelines that are being included in today's eLIFE.