



Jubilee of Sports

Activities for Teachers, Catechists, or Families

BACKGROUND

Throughout its history, the Church has engaged with sports. In the earliest days of the Church, Saint Paul used sports metaphors to teach Gentiles how to live Christian lives. In the medieval period, Sundays and feast days were filled with games and sports. During this time, Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that the virtue of moderation requires time for work, but also time for play and recreation. This was the original reason that sports and recess were included in schools in the Western world.

The Church has continued to express an interest in sports throughout the modern era. Pope Pius X brought sports to the Vatican in 1904 when he hosted a youth gymnastics event. Saint John Paul II was an athlete who enjoyed playing and watching soccer. He also enjoyed skiing, swimming, and kayaking. In 2004, he created the Church & Sport Office to promote the Christian vision of sport.

“Sport, as you well know, is an activity that involves more than the movement of the body: it demands the use of intelligence and the disciplining of the will.”

-Pope Saint John Paul II, September 2, 1987

As a boy in Argentina, Pope Francis played soccer and basketball. He was a lifelong fan of the local football club in Buenos Aires. In 2019, he helped create the Vatican’s first official sports federation. It is a team of athletes made up of priests, Vatican workers, and even members of the Swiss guard. Someday, Vatican City may even compete in the Olympics!

“A disciplined athlete is not merely one who observes the rules. . . . The true sportsperson always seeks to learn, to grow, to improve.”

-Pope Francis, February 9, 2023

Pope Leo XIV is also an athlete who enjoys playing tennis. He is a White Sox fan and attended the opening game of the 2005 MLB World Series.

On June 14-15, the Church is celebrating the Jubilee of Sport in the Vatican for all those involved in the world of sport.

The Church values sports as a tool for personal growth and community building. Playing sports requires training and discipline. This helps develop virtues such as temperance, humility, courage, and patience. Playing on a team helps to develop social skills, teamwork, and harmony. Sports can even foster solidarity among spectators.

“The fans are one and the same community when their team wins, but also in the face of loss and defeat. They are behind their players and respect both the players and the fans of the other team and the referees within a reciprocal fair play. These are moments, events and behavior that make us aware of the joy, the strength and the meaning of harmonious sport.”

-Dicastery for Laity, *Giving the Best of Yourself*



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BLESSING BEFORE AN ATHLETIC EVENT

This blessing is intended for athletes before they participate in a sporting event. The blessing asks that God may protect the athletes from injury and that throughout the event they may show respect for one another.

Begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Leader: Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All: Now and forever

Invite an athlete to read aloud one of the following passages from sacred Scripture:

- 2 Timothy 4:6-8 – *I have competed well; I have finished the race.*
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 – *We win a crown that is imperishable.*

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: Strong and faithful God,
as we come together for this contest,
we ask you to bless these athletes.

Keep them safe from injury and harm,
instill in them respect for each other,
and reward them for their perseverance.

Lead us all to the rewards of your Kingdom
where you live and reign forever and ever.

All: Amen

-From Book of Blessings

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DIRECTIONS: Complete the crossword puzzle below to learn about Catholic athletes.

Across

2. Olympic medalist Katie Ledecky says her faith was strengthened through her years in Catholic schools. Her sport is _____.
4. Thousands of children play sports in their Catholic schools through CYO, which stands for Catholic _____ Organization.
5. Pope Leo XIV is a big fan of one of his hometown of Chicago's famous sports teams, the Chicago (two words) _____.
6. Even though his career in _____ ended in 1935, Catholic athlete Babe Ruth is still one of the top home-run hitters.
8. Pope Francis was a life-long sports fan, especially of this sport called *futbol* in his home country of Argentina.
9. There are patron saints for soccer, baseball, hockey, and others, but St. Sebastian is the best known patron saint for all _____.
10. U.S. Catholic athlete Bonnie Blair competed in four Olympics in her sport of speed _____.

Down

1. While Pope John Paul II was an athlete who also enjoyed hiking and kayaking, he is best known for liking this winter sport.
3. Catholic athlete Simone Biles flipped and twisted her way to 11 Olympic medals as one of the world's best _____.
7. St. John de Brébeuf helped popularize the sport of _____ after he saw indigenous people playing it in Canada in the 1600s.

baseball
gymnasts
lacrosse
skating
skiing
soccer
sports
swimming
white sox
youth

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