

OLYMPIC IDEALS



On the evening of July 23, I stayed up later than usual to watch some of the opening ceremony of the Olympics. There were many of the familiar features of Olympic opening ceremonies, such as the parade of athletes from the various countries. I particularly enjoyed the great variety in this parade. Some countries had hundreds of athletes marching. Some

countries had only a couple of athletes. Some were dressed in very simple uniforms. Some had long robes of brilliant colours. This is one of the constant joys of the Olympics – athletes from so many countries reflecting such different national styles. We see this at each Olympics. However, this Friday evening, there were also reminders that these games are unusual, being held in the midst of the Covid pandemic. The athletes and officials and the small number of spectators were wearing masks. There was a time of silence to remember those who have died from the virus. Overall, though, the tone was positive, looking forward to great achievements in the many kinds of sport and celebrating how sport can bring people together from all around the world.

The Olympics present us with very positive ideals – the ideals of doing our personal best and being united with others in a team effort and being friendly and fair even as we compete with others. We see this in the Olympic oath that's recited at the start of the games. The oath was introduced in 1920, in response to some unsporting incidents at earlier games. The wording has developed over the years, for example, in response to



the problem of doping. The modern wording is a promise to take part fairly. "We promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play. We all commit ourselves to sport without doping and cheating. We do this, for the glory of sport, for the honour of our teams and in respect for the Fundamental Principles of Olympism."



We can also see such positive ideals in the Olympic motto: “Faster, higher, stronger.” This suggests the constant effort of the athletes to keep improving, to be always striving to do better. This year the International Olympic Committee approved the addition of the word "together". Perhaps, this was influenced by our experience of the pandemic. We’re facing this crisis in company with people all around the world and this

has brought home the need to work together to support one another through this time of trial. At the Opening Ceremony on Friday evening, the Olympic motto was projected on the centre of the stadium in large letters: “Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together”.

The Olympics proclaim the ideals of doing our best, showing respect for others, fostering a spirit of friendship between people of all nations. These ideals are in harmony with the ideals proposed by St Paul in the text we heard a few minutes ago from his letter to the Ephesians. “I implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.”



These ideals can inspire us all – whether we’re athletes at the Olympics or whether we’re playing with our local club, whether we’re full of youthful energy or whether we’re older and need to take things more slowly. It’s a coincidence that Pope Francis has nominated today as a day to remember grandparents and seniors. The Olympics generally puts the spotlight on relatively young athletes. Today’s remembrance of grandparents and seniors highlights the role of the older members of our community. As we get older, the Olympic motto of “faster, higher, stronger” might not be so appropriate. In fact, as we get older, our motto might be, “slower, lower, weaker”. But we can all share the final word of the Olympic motto, “together”. As we continue this Mass, I invite you to pray for the members of our local community and for people throughout the world. Pray for the young and for those who are older. May we all be inspired to do our personal best. May we all lead a life worthy of our vocation. May we do all we can to promote the peace that binds us together.



Bishop Paul Bird CSSR