

**06/26/16 ..... 13 C**

-- When an athlete is training to qualify for the Olympics, he/she needs to be focused. Everything must contribute to that goal. What that person eats, the training schedule, the daily routine, are all geared toward this goal.

-- I've read several books by Olympic athletes. Many of them began at a very young age. They often speak of all the things they gave up: the normal high school activities such as school prom, dates and just hanging out. Their lives could not be normal because they had such high goals. And it was worth it to them.

-- Jesus tells us today that anyone who wishes to follow him must have that same type of focus. Discipleship is not a part-time activity which we perform in our spare time. Once we begin to have this attitude we lose focus and the goal gradually slips away.

-- Yes, the vast majority of his followers have to get a job to make a living and to care for their families. We all have obligations to our communities, our country and other groups. But whatever we do must contribute to the singular goal of following the Lord faithfully.

-- So, if we have a family, we must teach our children what is truly valuable. We must show them that being faithful is more important than making tons of money. We must witness to the fact that it is more important to be truthful than to be popular.

-- And we can't put false idols in competition with our commitment to Jesus Christ. For example, I cringed when I saw a bumper sticker which said: *God, guns and guts made us free. Let's keep all three.*

-- Now I didn't cringe because I'm a fanatic on gun control or a total pacifist. I'm not. I cringed because this type of attitude puts other things on the same level as God. And that is idolatry, no matter what the "other things" are.

-- Maintaining our focus on the Lord and his eternal life is no easier for those of us who are so-called religious professionals. It is just as easy for us to get distracted by caring more for our ease and comfort than for what God wishes us to do for his people.

-- It is all too easy to want to have it both ways: to want to be in God's favor, while still sampling the things of this world that are enticing but not in keeping with our calling as followers of Christ.

-- That is where focus comes in. We must have a focus as keen as that of an Olympic athlete. We can't start the plow and be looking back constantly at the things of the world.

-- We may have to sacrifice some things that seem nice but distract us from our mission. Those things will not be the same for everyone, but all of us will face those sacrifices.

-- The time to do so is now. We can't put it off presuming we will be ready in a few years. Just last Sunday I visited a woman in Toledo Hospital. She didn't look that bad and she was preparing for heart surgery.

-- Hours later she died suddenly, and we buried her this Thursday. She had lived her life faithfully as a mother, grandmother and a woman dedicated to the things of God.

-- She put her hand to the plow and did not look back. Now, I (and many members of our parish) are confident she shares in the joy of God's kingdom.

-- May we resolve to attain the same focus, so as to put God's kingdom above all else.