

**All Saints Day – 2015**  
**Losing the Game to Win the Race**  
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*And Jesus seeing the multitudes...opened his mouth...saying, blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are they that mourn...blessed are the meek...blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness...blessed are the merciful...blessed are the pure of heart...blessed are the peacemakers...blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness...blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake... (Matthew 5:1-12)*

We have all been taught from our earliest ages that winning is best. To win the game, to win the prize...second place is only the first loser. There is so much celebration for the winner and little regard for the defeated. The worldly focus on winning has at times caused riots, destruction, and even death, proving that our focus on winning can get out of hand and distort the camaraderie and friendship that competition is supposed to inspire. Now, I am not against competition, nor am I against having winners and losers, but I am concerned about the immoral and unchristian behaviors that the secular side of humanity engages.

This is why I came away so inspired by a newsfeed that I wish I could show here...that I wish the whole world could see. A young man, Keith is his name, goes to Olivet Middle School in Michigan. He is on the football team but does not play. His sweet character prompts him to hug everyone he sees all while displaying a most honest and accepting smile. Now, remember back to middle school...not the most welcoming place for youth to fit in, let alone if you were confined to a disability that separated you from the other kids. Middle school can be a mixed bag of rejection and confusion. But...at this middle school there are a group of very special young men who have embraced the sport of football...a game that demands there be a winner and a loser.

But behind the scenes, unknown to coaches, teachers, parents and other students the Olivet Eagles proved that there is great goodness in

the heart of mankind. In the secrecy of each others counsel, this team chose to make Keith's day, his week...to simply make him happy by allowing him to score even if it meant throwing the game. They all played hard to get as close to the goal line as possible without scoring a touchdown and with an open field ahead of him the ball carrier ran up to the goal line, stopped and put the ball down. You could hear the crowd booing! You can imagine the coach's utter disillusionment, the parents rooting for victory suddenly caught in disbelief! What just happened? The next play would clear the air...these kids new more at twelve and thirteen years old than most adults with years of experience. Keith was brought on the field, given the ball after the hike and encased by his entire team as they powered through enemy lines to make the score! This was the best day ever for this young man and for his parents. Funny...the newsfeed never went into who actually won the game but...I guess in the end everyone did.

At the end of the video one of the Olivet Middle School football players is being interviewed. You can see the dramatic effect this act of kindness toward Keith had on him; *"He's never been, like, cool or popular, this young man says, and he went from being pretty much a nobody to making everyone's day."* He admits it was not his idea and that he would not, on his own, have given any thought to giving Keith the chance at glory. But a changed occurred in him on this field. He continues through tears; *"I kind of went from being someone who cares only about myself and my friends to caring about everyone and trying to make everyone's day and everyone's life."*

Now, I saw this newsfeed a couple of weeks ago... and it obviously touched me, but it sat in the recesses of my mind until I read today's Gospel reading and saw myself... and each of you on that field. You see, as Christians, we too are engaged in a battle for victory but we are not called to play by worldly standards. The Olivet Eagles whether they won the game or not won the ultimate victory. And it was not won based on the secular rules of the game...it was won because of the love of God shining forth from willing hearts. Hearts willing to make a small difference in someone's life, not knowing that they would affect millions.

Small gestures that can change the world, having nothing to do with proper rules...that's what the Beatitudes are all about. The Beatitudes give power to the Christian that the world cannot understand. It's not

about 'this' game or 'this' particular success...it is about race. The game is only a worldly perspective and only lasts for the moment...The game of life is only a sequence of events which give life to the race. And it is the race that gives focus to the spiritual significance of our duties towards God. The beatitudes are the guides by which we can stop mid-game and realize the opportunity we have to really make a difference...and we too can expect to get booed...booed by those who don't understand.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit:* The viewing world would tell us that only a strong spirit can win the game. And on the field we fight against those whose arrogance tries to break our Christian faith...while they seek to degrade our moral integrity. They fight us on every side on what they think is a weakness. But, it is the poor in spirit, feeling a deep sense of spiritual poverty, who seek the Lord continually and come to the Lord as a humble child. Humility, in the end, will reach more brothers and sisters for Christ than worldly arrogance could ever imagine. And in the end, it will be the poor in spirit who will enter the kingdom of heaven.

*Blessed are they that mourn:* In this world it's all about overcoming and showing great strength in the face of adversity. "Hey, life's tough, things happen, I take care of myself and so should you." But again, sitting in the bleachers they miss the point. The world is in such a sinful state and so many are not even aware of their demise. So it is our duty to show a different kind of power, to acknowledge and mourn the sinful state of this world and to pray unceasingly for its repentance. This is what it means to mourn; to stand up in the face of a fallen world and call it like it is! A willful disobedience towards God...What kind of world would this be if Christians were unwilling to go the emotional distance to prove to those who sit in the bleachers and watch, that our state of affairs is sad. So we mourn and we pray on our knees for repentance. And in the end they will understand that we are not only praying for ourselves...but for them also...because we only mourn for what we have lost in love. And in the end, we are promised by Christ himself, that we will be comforted, and will find strength in His consolation.

*Blessed are the meek:* Humble and gentle are not the qualities the world looks for in a winner. Obnoxious and on the fringe is what wins popularity. The world would see the meek as those easily pushed around and taken advantage of. As though they have nothing to offer

but small lives of no consideration. But it is the meek through which the true colors of others are exposed, the light of God illuminating the missteps and misguided notions of those who worship the false idols of a misguided world. The wicked would see the meek as easy prey and seek to be their undoing but, psalm 37 tells us *"Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more...but the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity."* The meek shall inherit the earth.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:* This is simply a striving to do the very things God wants us to do despite the battle that rages within us to do those things contrary to His word. We see in front of us the expectations of the crowd, but we know what the Holy Spirit has put into our hearts...and that must be our answer. Risking the loss of what the world offers as a prize, shunning the acclamation of onlookers, putting aside our own selfish desires to bend low and show Godly love, is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working in us, guiding us in the ways of righteousness.

*Blessed be the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers:* Mercy...Oh what a quality it is to have understanding for someone who sits in a dark place and not offer judgment. To be merciful you have to have a pure heart...you have to be a peacemaker. The Olivet Eagles showed how sweet the results of mercy can be when they put the disability of another before their own glory! Judgment is for the Lord...compassion and understanding are the signposts of love that God put into our hearts. Those who are merciful...gain mercy, those of a pure heart...they shall see God, those who work toward peace...they are the children of God.

The Beatitudes when read from an unformed and worldly perspective can be seen as weaknesses. When Christ set forth the Beatitudes it was to instruct those who would follow Him on how to win the race, how to overcome our ultimate opponent, how to win the battle over evil. But, when you read the beatitudes you can see why the secular world would see us as a vulnerable adversary...a team ready to be squashed, a loser in the great game of life. But, as these two teams met on that field in Michigan, to battle each other and gain the victory, one team rose to a higher calling...a calling beyond the world's expectation.

The young men at Olivet Middle School did something that should cause us all to stop and bear witness...we are all members together in this world and everyone deserves their place in the game, be it football or life in general. As we all are aware; it's not about the winning or the losing but how we play the game. And as we play the game of life let's remember why we're in the game in the first place...to show the love of God to all the world, fighting against those who would persecute us, paving the way for others to find eternal life through Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.