

THE SAINTS

THE LESSON: HEBREWS 11, 12

The writers of the New Testament sometimes used sports images to help the early Christians understand their part in the work of God's kingdom. Like the role of an athlete, our role requires discipline, perseverance, and a focus on our goal.

Something we also have in common with athletes is the fact that our (spiritual) success doesn't happen in isolation. There are others who went before us, who left us an example in life and prayer. Think of those whose stories are recorded in scripture, but think as well of those who have lived faith-filled lives since the canon of scripture was closed. And consider also those still living who support and encourage us along the way.

Sue Careless wrote, "We don't come before God as isolated individuals, not even in our private devotions, but as members of a family, a community of faith, the communion of saints". Not only are we part of a family that spans the globe, but we are also part of a family that spans time!

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Pick one of the following prayers to pray with each day this week:

LORD, teach me to be generous.
 Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
 to give and not to count the cost,
 to fight and not to heed the wounds,
 to toil and not to seek for rest,
 to labour and not to ask for reward,
 save that of knowing that I do your will.

- *St Ignatius of Loyola*

DEAR JESUS, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go;
 Flood my soul with your spirit and life;
 Penetrate and possess my whole being so completely
 That all my life may be only a radiance of yours;
 Shine through me and be so in me
 That everyone with whom I come into contact
 May feel your presence within me.
 Let them look up and see no longer me—but only Jesus.
 Amen.

- *John Henry Newman*

O GOD, early in the morning I cry to you.
 Help me to pray
 And to concentrate my thoughts on you:
 I cannot do this alone.

In me there is darkness,
 But with you there is light;
 I am lonely, but you do not leave me;
 I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;
 I am restless, but with you there is peace.

In me there is bitterness,
 but with you there is patience;
 I do not understand your ways,
 But you know the way for me...
 Restore me to liberty,
 And enable me to live now
 That I may answer before you and before me.

Lord, whatever this day may bring,
 Your name be praised.

- *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O Heavenly Father, who in thy Son Jesus Christ hast given us a true faith and a sure hope: Help us, we pray thee, to live as those who believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to life everlasting; and strengthen this faith and hope in us all the days of our life; through the love of thy Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen. (PRAYER FOR THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, BCP PAGE 56)

THE SAINTS

HEBREWS 11, 12: **OUR CLOUD OF WITNESSES**

11 ¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible...

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going... ²⁴By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin...

³²And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth...

12 ¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.