



Developing a Theology of Sport

Today's Parent Note is contributed by Andy Burns, Religion and Family Life Consultant for the Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board Ontario, Canada



Theology can be understood as the study of the mystery of being; it is a study of who we are through the eyes of faith. Theology challenges us to reflect upon our relatedness to God, to others and to the created order. A study of theology can enrich our understanding of the meaning and purpose of living and of our daily activities.

A Christian theology of sport invites and encourages each member of the Church to enter into a deep and robust conversation about the meaning, purpose and value of sport from a faith perspective. It is an activity in which we desire to express our beliefs about the relationship between sport and the Gospel and how that relationship may be best lived out in our everyday sporting activities.

The three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity provide Christians an overall understanding of how they are to participate in sport the way God intends. Faith is the Christian vision of life, it is an awareness of God's presence and will in our lives. It is the vision which gives our lives meaning and purpose. It is this vision that constantly refreshes us. It is by faith that we know where we are going, making it more likely that we will get there. Faith gives a vision for Christian participation in sport.

Faith gives rise to hope. Hope gives us the strength to carry on when everything seems to go wrong. It grants us the certainty of God's presence with and within us when we play our games, and the strength to carry on in our goal of making Gospel values present in sport, despite the obstacles of our fallen human nature. As Christians, we have great hope for the conversion of sport towards the good development of each person.

Hope is not an end. Hope must bear fruit in charity, which is love of neighbour, love of ourselves and love of God. Charity is a call to loving action, it is a response to the presence of God in our lives. Charity calls us to act in loving ways towards all those we meet in our sporting communities.

A theology of sport is not interested in changing the nature of competitive sport. It presupposes that sporting competitions are considered for what they are: a game in which the better side wins. A theology of sport seeks to discover how the true nature of sport can serve the good of the human person.

A theology of sport will promote discussions that identify and promote the many positive aspects of sport as well as conversations that will recognize and root out the various abuses of human dignity we see too often in sport.

Here are a few questions to inspire your family's personal reflection and conversations about sport:

- How would you describe the meaning and purpose of sport?
- What values are shaping your child's youth sport today?
- What may be missing in our understanding of the meaning and purpose of sport?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge in our thinking about sport?
- How can parents place an emphasis upon faith, hope and charity within your children's sport journey?

Christian Meditation: A Family Prayer Activity

Through prayer we develop our friendship with God; through prayer we deepen our awareness of God's presence and will in our lives. A practice of daily prayer keeps us connected to the source of our being and of our good activity in the world. It is essential if we are to become the people



and organizations we are meant to be. As Christians we are blessed to have a wide variety of prayer practices in our faith tradition; each one connected by the Spirit of Jesus praying within us.

One prayer you might try practicing as a family is Christian Meditation: the prayer of the heart. Instructions: Sit down. Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word - a prayer word or mantra. You may choose the ancient Christian prayer-word "Maranatha". "Maranatha" is a word which invokes the Lord's coming or presence. Say it as four equal syllables. Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and - above all - simply. Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and in each meditation day to day. Don't visualise but listen to the word, as you

say it. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images and other words. Don't fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it as soon as you realize your attention wanders. Practice this as a family each evening, starting for just a few minutes and building that time as you are more comfortable with this prayer method. It may take a time to develop this discipline, but the peace is will bring from Christ is measurable.

Resource: The World Community for Christian Meditation, www.wccm.org

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