



10th Sunday after Pentecost

So, have you heard these names before? Have you heard of Simone Biles? Yeah, how about Michael Phelps, Katie Ledecky, or Mark Spitz, or Carl Lewis? These are just a few of the thousands of athletes who have competed in one-top medals at the Olympics and other events over the years. They represent some of the finest athletes in the world. Who's your favorite athlete? Who do you admire the most? So, the question here is, what does it take to make it to the Olympics? It's estimated an athlete trains anywhere from four to 10 years plus, depending on the sport, to become an Olympic hopeful. The athlete trains his or her body up to seven hours a day, five to six days a week. The athlete follows a regimen of plenty of sleep, but nutritious diet, conditioning their mind, and positive motivational thinking as well. And the athlete doesn't make it to the Olympics or any serious competition on their own. They need excellent coaches and teammates. They need fans or a supportive base that believes in them and are there for them and cheers them on. They need the moral and financial support of family and sponsors. Many sacrifice personal time, hold down part-time jobs to pay the bills. Athletes who aren't funded by a government agency or corporate entity must go to go fund me sites at the largest of friends and family. The mother of Gabby Douglas, the first African-American to win a gold medal in gymnastics, had to file for bankruptcy. Another Olympian's family had faced foreclosure on their home. It isn't easy to follow that dream to the Olympic gold.

Now our passage from Hebrews, so here's the point here. The passage from Hebrews talks about the gold medal winners of faith that we heard today. This passage is often called the fall of faith fame. From the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea to the faith of those unknown persecuted individuals who wandered the deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground and everyone in between. The passage talks about judges who fought invaders and defended the ways of God, Gideon, Barack, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel in the prophets, King David, the seer Daniel, who stood up for the faith against foreign rulers at the risk of his life. You see our passage from Hebrews speaks to us of an Olympic faith that we are all called to. Now, not many of us can swim and are participate competitively or even leisurely in gymnastics or archery, volleyball, basketball, track and field. Yet as members of God's family, we are called to an Olympic faith that we heard today. We have each been given a gift that we are called to exercise and to train. We are to put our faith into practice. Not just five hours a day, but the whole day. As long as God wants us to. We are called to train like the best of them, like those who saw the walls of Jericho fall among them, rehab, that prostitute who believed in God, the God of Israel, and was saved. Very few of the Olympic athletes ever get medals, right? That's not why they want, they may want the medal, but they go because they love the sport. These athletes go to the game and they train hard for something greater, something that pushes them on to break records to endure even harder and push themselves to the limits of what's capable. That drive is in us, each of us too. Each of us is called like the great cloud of witnesses to live a life of grace and witness that Jesus, the author and pioneer of our faith, models for us and the Holy Spirit who coaches us daily to follow. We must run with perseverance this race that is placed before us.



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Yusra Mardini, who was 19 at the time, was a member of what was called the refugee team in 2021. The first ever team in the Olympics, her family fled war-torn Syria. And she tells it when they're overlaid in boat capsized, she and her sister swam for three hours, pushing and pulling the boat till it reached the shore. And she saved 20 people. Now we may not find ourselves in the Aegean Sea, but there are capsized boats all around us just waiting for us to jump in and help and to save. That's why we must run with perseverance this race that is before us. And that's why we remind ourselves as we come to church, as we read the scriptures and pray, as we speak against injustice, they are bring a bag of groceries to the food pantry. That is like a beautifully executed backstroke in our exercise of our Olympic faith. When we bring school supplies for needed children, visit the lonely, the sick or imprisoned. That's like a perfectly executed high jump. Because we exercise, we are called to Olympic faith. This is because Olympic faith has its eyes on the prize. Like the Apostle Paul reminds us, as he says, I press on to reach the end of the race to receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Jesus Christ, calls us. We each have a place in that Olympic call of faith, fame that Hebrews lays out for us. Where are we called to express this magnificent faith of ours?

Where are you called? What is before you now? We are surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses who have seen us thus far. We are the Yusraies, the Michaels, the Gabbies, the Simone's of our faith. The world needs our Olympic faith to run with endurance and never stop, never give up, never look back until we've crossed the finish line, knowing that we stand on the legacy of Olympians of faith who are cheering us on to cross that finish line into the waiting arms of Jesus who is, after all, our divine coach and the pioneer and perfecter of this faith. Amen.