

Archbishop Smith: Choosing The Right Team

Sports news this past week has been preoccupied with the choice of team a star player from the Toronto Raptors would make. At about the same time, the Gospel passage proclaimed at mass on Sunday (Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20) was also concerned with participation on a team: the community of those who follow Jesus Christ. I couldn't help but notice the striking (and vast) difference between the two scenarios.

In the world of professional sports, a free agent and star player is in the driver's seat. The choice is made largely on the player's terms. Deciding to be on the "discipleship team", as it were, is the opposite; I join and participate not on my terms but on those of Jesus Christ. After all, he is Lord and God. Moreover, I do not make the choice to fulfill my own desires; I am chosen in accord with the designs and purposes of God.

The professional sports team is assembled by the owner and officials to play a game. Jesus summons into community his followers to serve his mission. The former provides transient entertainment to a certain fan population, while the latter aims at life eternal for all people.

Success on the professional circuit brings wealth and fame. To serve the mission of Jesus Christ, one's only possession is trust in the providence of God ("Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals..."), and "successful" proclamation of the Gospel will likely bring not popularity but opprobrium ("See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves").

At the level of professional sports, only those players judged to be the most qualified will make the team. For his mission, Jesus chooses the unqualified. Given the nature of the mission, how could it be otherwise? The popular expression is true: Jesus does not call the qualified, but qualifies those who are called.

And God DOES call. When we pray for vocations in the name of Jesus and in accord with his command ("...ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest"), the Father responds. However, our world makes it very difficult to answer. The materialistic lure present not only in professional sports but also in just about every facet of Western society is very strong. In truth, though, the lure is an illusion, and no falsehood will ever satisfy. Truth – reality – is Jesus Christ and the destiny God gives humanity in him. There can be no greater satisfaction than that which comes from the surrender of self to his mission for the life of the world. Why serve any other purpose? Why choose any other team?