

Archbishop Smith: The Coach or the Crowds?

Last week I was invited to an Edmonton Oilers game here in their home city. It is quite the spectacle, and it didn't take long for the fans to get into the experience. We were invited to make lots of noise, but, in truth, fans don't need that invitation. We certainly didn't need it that night. Throughout the game we shouted out our directions to the team: "Shoot! Pass! Get it into the end zone! Get it out!" Etc. There might have been a few other epithets thrown around, but I won't mention those here.

As the game went on, I couldn't help but wonder who the players were listening to. Were they paying attention to the crowds, or did they listen to the coach? The answer is obvious. Their discipline requires that they listen to and follow the directions of the coach, tuning out the voices of the crowds as they do.

A similar discipline would benefit us all. Crowds "shout at us" without cease through the many forms of modern communications. There we are given a variety of commands as to how to live, what is right and wrong, what will make us happy, and the like. Societal fracture demonstrates that we lack discipline in discerning from among these voices the one to which we should listen and which can unite us in an effective playing of the game of life. The reason is clear: we need a coach to whom we listen in common, yet Western culture fails to identify one apart from the autonomous self. This is tearing us apart.

The truth is we have a coach: Jesus Christ. He alone leads us through this temporal life on earth to eternity in the next. Once we identify his as the one voice to whom we must listen, we appreciate more clearly that those of the "crowds" are in many ways seeking to lead us away from obedience to it.

A grace to pray for this week would be that of discipline to tune out all dissenting voices from the crowds and to remain focused upon hearing and obeying the commands of the coach. This discipline will necessarily include developing the habit of seeking out the coach by reading the Bible. I stress here the word "habit". As believers, the reading of Sacred Scripture must be a steady and regular part of daily life. A habit, in other words. After all, as we heard St Paul teach us on the weekend, all of Scripture is inspired by God. We ignore it at our peril, because, as St Jerome famously taught, ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

We need a coach. We need to listen to him and not the crowds. This means we need to read Sacred Scripture. May God awaken us to this need and grant us the discipline we require to listen and follow.