

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

This year I feel sorry that the Steelers are not going to the Super Bowl – Giants vs. Patriots. I would like to share with you faith lessons from the Super Bowl games. Among the many lessons that we can apply to our spiritual life, I would like to point out three things: 1) The importance of commitment, 2) Team Spirit, and 3) Running toward victory.

There are many humorous connections between faith and football – but there are also serious ones as well. **First, both faith and football require commitment.** The word ‘commitment’ has a rich meaning. The dictionary defines commitment in this way: 1) A promise to do something or behave in a particular way; 2) The hard work and loyalty that someone gives to an organization, activity, or person; 3) The use of money, time, people etc. for a particular purpose. You can bet the players on winning teams are seriously committed to the goal of getting a Super Bowl Ring. Football requires commitment; therefore, players understand the saying, “No pain, no gain.”

But doesn’t faith also require commitment? The Apostle Paul employed athletic images to describe our spiritual journeys: “You’ve all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard...I don’t know about you, but I’m running hard for the finish line. I’m giving it everything I’ve got. No sloppy living for me! I’m staying alert and in top condition” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27a). “No pain, no gain” was a byword for the Apostle Paul.

Vince Lombardi, former coach of the Green Bay Packers and the winning coach of the first Super Bowl, said, “The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.” The will of players leads team to commit for winning. Likewise, God calls you and me out of the world and inspires us to commit our lives for Christ’s sake as a part of the body of Christ – the church. When we commit ourselves strongly to family and church, we can be led on the path to win the game of our lives by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Second, in football as in faith, we need each other – the spirit of teamwork. No football player can go it alone. No “I” but “We”: we work together, supporting one another – shared joy and victory. Each player needs the other members on the team to be successful, and each team includes players with a variety of differing gifts: Quarterbacks, halfbacks, and fullbacks; defensive players, offensive players, kickers all are necessary. So, the quarterback has no right to look down on the line. In fact, he needs their blocking if he is to survive. So it is in Christ’s church. There are many parts – many members – but one body. Each member is necessary for the health of the body (1 Cor. 12:12). Each member needs to communicate with one another – invisible means of communication through

prayers and thought, and visible means of communication through phone call, email, text message, etc.

Sometimes our job is to cheer each other on, like the crowd in the stadium; we need each other to cheer us on. And at the same time, we need each other to call us back when we're heading in the wrong direction. But what's important is that we need each other. **Football and faith are team efforts**, and in both football and faith, we are headed for a goal.

Third, we run to win - toward victory. Set the clear goal during your journey and be led by the Spirit. The apostle Paul says, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

In 1920, at age 25, George Gipp, Notre dame's star player, died of pneumonia. On his deathbed, George Gipp spoke to Knute Rockne, his coach. He said, "Someday, when things look real tough for Norte Dame, ask the boys to go out there and win one for the Gipper."

Jesus also died young, but on the third day God raised him up from the dead with mighty power. Jesus is alive even now in Spirit. He has already won the Big One for us, the big victory over sin and death. He just calls us to keep on winning the small victories against sin and for love every day.

As someone said, God calls us together into a "holy huddle." God calls us to keep on winning, not for the "Gipper," but for Christ. On this Super Bowl Sunday, let us recommit ourselves to going for the goal of loving, honoring, and serving Jesus, helping each other and relying on the power of God's Holy Spirit, until the goal is fulfilled and God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

I hope we all understand that faith, like football, demands commitment. But faith depends on grace. Plus in faith and in football, we need each other – and that both faith and football are going for a goal. We, the followers of Jesus Christ, are called to serve the Lord as well as to win the prize from the Lord Jesus. The crown of victory would be given to each of us as we strive to run the race of faith. Scripture says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). The Lord will lead you until you arrive at your finish line! Amen. Enjoy the game!