

I've been pastoring the cathedral a little over three years. Shortly after I arrived, I noticed a certain regular at the 8 pm Mass. You couldn't not notice him. Short of stature, he showed up full of energy with a smile that lit the room. After a few months, I asked his name. "Joe Quijas," he said. I asked him in Spanish if he spoke Spanish, and he said yes but some people thought his last name was French. He told me immediately he just loved coming to Mass here.

As you all know, Joe just loved everything in life. He loved his work at Quindaro. He loved his family, especially the kids and grandkids. He loved the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. He loved long distance running. These were not merely extras in his life. They filled him with purpose and joy. Today it is hard to imagine that Joe's energy has flickered out.

The excerpt we just heard from St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy is a favorite for funerals, but it seems especially fitting for Joe. Paul wrote this near the end of his life to a young Timothy beginning his career. Paul gave him lots of good advice, and then he took stock of his own ministry. Paul wrote, "The time of my departure is at hand." I wonder how many of us facing that situation will be able to say what Paul said next so confidently, and what I can imagine Joe saying: "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith." Paul awaited a crown of righteousness that he believed the Lord would award him, his prize at the end of a successful, competitive race.

Joe's running career makes an excellent metaphor for his life, and a fine parallel to these thoughts by St. Paul. Joe was not a sprinter; he was a long distance runner. Such runners start the race with the unseen end in mind. They pace themselves the whole way. They face obstacles they did not predict: some thrown their way by other people running the same race, others brought by circumstances beyond their control like the weather, and still others pertaining to their own training or lack thereof. Joe ran a long-distance life. His goal was to cross the finish line into heaven, and he spent his many years preparing and training, overcoming obstacles, and finding great joy all along the path.

This gospel is another passage that fits Joe very well. Jesus says that people will come to know the Father if they come to know him. Then he says some of the most comforting words in the New Testament, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Every athlete covets rest. They love exercise, but they especially love the adrenalin-fueled rest that follows. It's no coincidence that we call what follows this life "eternal rest." In fact, that's the meaning of the Latin word for a funeral Mass: *Requiem* means "rest".

Rest is what follows a race. You and I, we aren't there yet; we're still running. We look to Joe for inspiration along the way. Like him, we keep Christ as our goal in hopes that he will reward us with the victor's crown. That means training by saying our prayers and helping others. It means imagining the unseen finish line and heading that way. It also means enjoying the race, the beauty in the world, both in nature and in art, the family and friends who accompany us, and the meaningful work we are given to do. After all that, we can all look forward to what Christ alone offers: eternal rest.