

**Sports Faith International Hall of Fame Mass
Vigil of Pentecost**

**Saint Patrick Church
Lake Forest, Illinois**

May 23, 2026

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here to celebrate this Mass on the Vigil of Pentecost, a word that means 50. It commemorates the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus to his disciples while He was still on earth. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that this event took place 50 days after Jesus' resurrection (*Acts of the Apostles* 2:1-11) and is commonly understood to be the birth of the Church.

I am here this evening for the annual gathering of those involved in an organization known as Sports Faith International, which is dedicated to contributing to positive cultural change by showcasing the virtues and achievements of exemplary athletes, coaches and teams. It utilizes the best of new and traditional media to feature and encourage the powerful personal testimonies of outstanding athletes at all levels, who are living out their faith on and off the field.

Each year, the Sports Faith Hall of Fame inducts outstanding athletes, coaches, and teams who are exemplary role models. Our Sports Faith Hall of Fame Induction Ceremonies after Mass will honor the achievements of faith-filled members of the sporting community. It is most fitting that we begin this celebration with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, giving thanks to our Lord for the many blessings that He bestows upon us.

There is actually a very close relationship between religion and sports. I have written two books about sports and faith: *Holy Goals for Body and Soul: Eight Steps to Connect Sports with God and Faith* and *Running for a Higher Purpose: Eight Steps to Spiritual and Physical Fitness*. Both as a hockey goalie and as a marathon runner, I can attest to the strong link between one's frame of mind and how that influences what our bodies can do.

Earlier this year, the XXV Winter Olympic Games were held in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from February 6th to the 22nd, and of the XIV Paralympic Games were held in the same place from March 6th to 15th. On the occasion of past Olympic Games, Popes have emphasized how sport can play an important role for the good of humanity, especially in the promotion of peace. In 1984, for example, Saint John Paul II, speaking to young athletes from around the world at a Mass celebrated in the Olympic

Stadium in Rome, quoted the Olympic Charter, which regarded sport as an important factor of “better understanding between each other and of friendship, thereby helping to build a better and more peaceful world.”¹ He encouraged the participants with these words: “May your encounters be a symbolic sign for the whole of society and a prelude to that new era, in which people shall not lift up the sword against another (cf. *Is* 2:4).”²

Similarly, in anticipation of this year’s Olympic Games, Pope Leo XIV wrote a letter called “Life in Abundance,” on the value of Sport, in which he said that

sporting competitions can play an important role in fostering unity among people. It is interesting to note that the word competition is derived from two Latin words: *cum*, meaning “together,” and *petere*, meaning “to ask.” In a competition, therefore, it can be said that two people or two teams strive together for excellence. They are not mortal enemies. And in the time before or after the competition, there is usually an opportunity to meet and get to know one another. For this very reason, authentic sporting competition presupposes a shared ethical accord: the sincere acceptance of the rules and respect for the integrity of the contest. ... In this sense, sport offers valuable lessons that extend beyond the playing field. It teaches us that we can strive for the highest level without denying our

own fragility; that we can win without humiliating others; and that we can lose without being defeated as individuals. Fair competition thus safeguards a deeply human and communal dimension. It does not divide, but brings people together; it does not focus solely on the result, but values the journey; it does not idolize performance, but recognizes the dignity of those who play.³

As we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, it is good for us to recall that we received the Holy Spirit when we were baptized and again in the Sacrament of Confirmation, which “perfects Baptismal grace” and “gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply [in our identity as sons and daughters of God, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.”⁴

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts are for our spiritual growth. We also receive the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. These fruits,

like fruit on a tree, are meant to feed us. These fruits of the Holy Spirit feed us spiritually.

In our Gospel today (John 7:37-39), Jesus says, “Rivers of living water will flow within him who believes in me.” This fulfills the prophecy we heard from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel in our first reading (Ezekiel 37:1-14), that God would bring life into our dry bones by bringing His Spirit into us.

As athletes, we know that our bones and muscles need to be energized by spiritual motivation as well as by physical hydration. In the 24 marathons that I have completed, each time I crossed the finish line was an accomplishment of the spirit as much, if not more, than an accomplishment of my body.

Body and soul – the physical and the spiritual – are one unit until we die, but we also look forward to the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming of Our Lord, when our souls will be reunited with our bodies in glorified form. If we want the workings of the Holy Spirit to grow and flourish in our bodies and souls, we should fix our attention on three fundamental points: docility, the life of prayer, and union with the Cross of Christ.⁵

The word “docility” comes from the Latin *docere*, to teach. To be docile does not mean simply being passive, but being teachable. We must be willing to learn from the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

“In the second place, a life of prayer, because the giving of one’s self, the obedience and meekness of a Christian, are born of love and lead to love. And love leads to a personal relationship, to conversation and friendship. Christian life requires a constant dialogue with God. ... Let us acquire the habit of conversation with the Holy Spirit, who is the one who will make us holy.”⁶

“And finally, union with the Cross, because in the life of Christ, the Resurrection and Pentecost were preceded by Calvary. This is the order that must be followed in the life of any Christian. ... The Holy Spirit comes to us as a result of the Cross – as a result of our total abandonment to the will of God, of seeking only His glory and the renouncing of ourselves completely.”⁷

In conclusion, let us make our own the petitions sung in the Sequence of the Mass for Pentecost:

*Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!*

...

*In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.*

*O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of Thine,
And our inmost being fill!*

...

*On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend:*

*Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end. Amen. Alleluia.*

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter 1984* (Lausanne, 1983), p. 6.

² John Paul II, Homily, Mass for the Jubilee of Sport (Rome, Olympic Stadium, 12 April 1984), 3.

³ Letter of the Holy Father Leo XIV, "Life in Abundance," On the Value of Sport, February 6, 2026; accessed online at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2026/02/06/260206d.html>.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1316.

⁵ Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God* (London: Scepter, 2012), vol. 2, pp. 611-612.

⁶ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, p. 136.

⁷ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, p. 137.