

Sports and Spirituality

"Some in the church see sport as a threat as it can take time away from the sacredness of Sunday, and yet it is important that we begin to see sport as an attraction for young people to be drawn to the Church. Few see the link between sport and spirituality. Yet the relationship between sport and faith dates well back into history."

-- Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

Course Description:

In this semester course, students will explore and examine Catholic spirituality through the analogy of sports. Students will determine how human beings encounter the Holy in the midst of everyday life with emphasis on athletic experiences as both an athlete and a fan (of specific athletes and teams). Students will investigate the demands of developing and maintaining a healthy, life-giving spirituality and examine the role of community/a religious tradition in the formation of that. Ultimately, students will come to know more deeply the ways in which one relates to the Holy or the Transcendent in the course of their own faith journey.

Enduring Understandings

Students will:

- Understand Catholic spirituality and what makes it distinct.
- Understand that the spiritual way of interpreting Scripture is analogical and interpret the myriad ways in which saints and athletes are (and are not) role models.
- Understand the various ways that athletics reflects the goodness of God's own creative action.
- Know and articulate the principle elements of Ignatian Spirituality and be able to recognize God's movements in their own lives.

Student Outcomes

Students will:

- Come to a deeper and more tangible grasp of how they are spiritual persons and how to live a spiritual life in the 21st Century, a post-modern world.
- Recognize and be able to talk about a significant number of people in history who serve as models of a "Catholic spirituality."
- Become comfortable with examining their own lives and choices in light of these men and women's example (by way of compare and contrasting heroes in faith and in athletics).
- Understand sports and spiritual discipline as a means for acquiring virtue.
- Be able to articulate how vocational choices relate to discerning God's will as inclusive of and not separate from sports.

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Units

1. Foundations:

Sport, especially for the young, and when practiced with passion and within careful ethical boundaries, becomes a training ground for sound physical development, a school of both human and spiritual values, and a privileged means of personal growth and interaction with society. --Pope Benedict XVI

- How is it that we live in a “graced” universe?
- How are sports an analogy for our spiritual life?
- How can sports lead us to uncover our best and worst self?
- How are sports & competition places where we encounter G-d?
 - How are sports a “language that G-d speaks”?

2. What is Spirituality? What is Sport?:

Sport possesses considerable educational potential particularly for young people. So, for this reason, sport is of great importance not only when applied to free time but also in the formation of each individual.

--Pope Benedict XVI

- What is religion? What is spirituality?
- How should religion and spirituality impact my faith life?
- What makes (a) spirituality authentically “Catholic?”
- What distinguishes an athlete from a player?
- How does the practice of virtue lead to excellence?

3. Communion of Saints and Athletes

- What is saint? How are saints treasures of the Catholic faith?
- How have the lives and witness of saints changed the shape of the Catholic faith?
- How have the lives and witness of important athletes changed the nature of their sport?
- What do our spiritual and athletic heroes teach us about ourselves?

4. So What?

Sports are a real school of true human virtue. –John Paul II

- **Spirituality for Everyday Life**
- **Virtue and Vice**
- **Vocation**

Texts:

- Reader of essays and short stories, compiled by instructor
- My Life with the Saints by James Martin, SJ

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ESLR's:

- **Open to Growth:** *Through the analogy of sports/athletics students will broaden their understanding of the spiritual life. This course helps the student have tangible, measurable expectations by which to gauge their own lives from their study of men and women as examples of people of outstanding talent, virtue and faith.*
- **Intellectually Competent:** *Students will develop a rich understanding of Catholic spirituality—how it is lived and expressed in a variety of ways and manifested in the choices of people past and present.*
- **Loving:** *Immersing themselves in the creative work the Catholic tradition will engender in students a deeper love and appreciation of the work and life of the Church, and encourage them to participate in the love that God has for the world.*
- **Religious:** *Students will come to understand that a healthy and life giving spirituality is not separate from but leads to a religious tradition. Also, students will see, as possibly they never have before, how significant faith and religious belief is to a meaningful life, from the saints to the athletes we study.*
- **Committed to Doing Justice:** *Through the on-going study of character development/virtue ethics as applied to sports, students will come to a deeper understanding of what difference Christ makes to the good (and why that is needed in the world).*
- **Leaders in Collaboration:** *Upon completing the course, students will be equipped to articulate a more mature understanding of their faith and how to further develop an adult (healthy and life-giving) spirituality. This vocabulary and understanding will uniquely prepare them to serve as leaders in their own faith communities.*

Department Mission Statement:

As companions of Jesus, in Religious Studies we are committed to education that:

- *creates experiences where students and teachers encounter the living God through shared inquiry, discernment and prayer*
- *equips us to respond to the call of Jesus, as St. Ignatius did, by becoming leaders of competence, conscience and compassion in a multi-cultural world with a faith that seeks justice.*

This course will draw upon that which is already familiar to students—the wide world of sports—to deepen their understanding of what surrounds them—the spiritual world. In particular, Sports and Spirituality both supports the core movement of the department mission statement and invites students (as athletes and sports fans) to extend and deepen their understanding of what it means to be Catholic.

A course exploring the symbiosis of sports and spirituality will guide our students to discover that opportunities to to “encounter the living God,” in our “multi-cultural world” take place in what is most familiar to us, what we read, who we know, what gets us out of bed in the morning, what we are passionate about and what breaks our hearts.

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Sports as leisure, business and vocation demand leaders of competence, conscience, and compassion. This course will assist students both in appreciating the community diversity of paths to discipleship and in expressing a creative individual response to the call of Christ.

Five Core Dimensions of the RS Department

- **Scripture and Church:** *Both through the explicit content (units on spirituality, Catholic spirituality, pillars of Catholic spirituality and the Communion of Saints, etc) and analogy (Spirituality of Sports) students will deepen their understanding of the role scripture and church teaching play in their own faith journey. Incorporated into the study saints and athletes, will students investigate his/her individual religious practice. This includes religious writings and the doctrinal beliefs of his/her religious beliefs and others*
- **Catholic Moral and Social Teaching:** *Not only will students study the lives of saints and athletes who have a connection to building up justice in the world; many of the models (and antiheroes) espouse living out the Catholic moral and social teachings (or not) that the students covered in their Junior year.*
- **Sacred Traditions and God:** *Exploring pillars of Catholic spirituality will enhance student understanding of many sacred traditions/Traditions in the Catholic Church*
- **The Call to Discipleship:** *Through the study of spirituality, especially Ignatian spirituality, students will understand and respond to their deepest desires as related to and not separate from the deepest needs of the world. Furthermore, by immersing themselves in the creative work and experience of other believers, students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexity of the individual faith journey, especially their own.*
- **Prayer and Discernment:** *Students will be formerly introduced to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola vis a vi "The Ignatian Workout" and learn about Spiritual direction as a tool to consider in their faith development.*

Why is this course necessary?

I think this course meets students "where they are at." In other words it seeks to make meaning or invite students into something deeper in a world/area of interest that already fascinates them. I am continually amazed at how passionate both our male and female students are about sports. I want to invite students to think more intentionally how their spiritual development and faith lives need not be separate from their lived reality.

Also, I think there is great value in introducing young people to one of great spiritual treasures in the Catholic Church—the Communion of Saints. After all, the saints have made the same journey we are called to explore for ourselves. They serve as role models of the Christian life. I believe if we learn their language, we can have a better understanding of how a person can and is transformed in Christ.

Essentially, I came up with the idea for this course in response to the book "Eight Spiritual Heroes " formerly used in RS 400: Inspiring Lives—The Path to Faith. The author's purpose for

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writing this book was:

to explore the God experience and at the same time make some effort to restore the notion of hero. I have found many students are familiar with celebrities, but few with heroes, especially religious heroes. They know sports figures, movie stars and rock singers. But they rarely know people who inspire their deeper longings or serve as godly role models.

–Brennan Hill

If it were true that my students know sports figures, why shouldn't they know about their "deeper longings" as they pertain to faith? Why can't these very people serve as role models not only in their sport but for their spirituality as well? My hope is through student guided learning and inquiry the saints and the athletes they meet will bear witness that a life of faith and following Jesus Christ makes a profound difference.

By way of analogy, students will explore how their spirituality has been strengthened because of their experience as an athlete and conversely, how the experience of their sport has influenced their faith; the symbiosis.