

THE MARATHON MINDSET

The Importance of Staying the Course, Keeping the Pace and Finishing the Race

In the 4th Century BC, the Greek forces engaged the vaunted Persian army in the Battle of Marathon. Outnumbered 4 to 1, the Greeks launched a surprise attack which must have seemed suicidal. But at the end of the fierce struggle, over 6,000 Persians lay dead on the plains of Marathon while fewer than 200 Greeks had been killed. The Greek army had prevailed and thus secured their homeland in a time of tumult and uncertainty. The surviving Persians fled to their ships. One man, Philippides, was singled out by his commanding officer to take the news of the battle back to Athens. With a determination exceeded only by his zeal, Phillipides instantly followed the order and began to run toward the capital city—a distance of 26.3 miles. No one knows precisely how long it took Philippides to cover those arduous miles, but villagers along the route reportedly said that he never slowed down, never wavered. “He ran like the wind”, wrote one poet.

As a soldier, Philippides had fought for hours that day in the battle. Even before his first step, he was already exhausted, yet he pushed himself beyond all normal limits of endurance. Urging his body on, Philippides ran valiantly. When at last he entered Athens, he shouted in a loud voice, **“N E N I K I K A M E N”**—which means **“We were Victorious!”** After uttering this one word, so full of joy and promise, Philippides felt his mission was accomplished.

Today, the place where Philippides died nearly 2500 years ago is a memorial mound—a tribute to a fallen soldier and the armies he represented. For generations the Greek nation and Greeks around the world have celebrated his feat and honored his memory. Did you know that the Battle of Marathon is studied at all Military Schools around the world including West Point? The marathon race—retracing Philippides’ original course—was added to the Olympic Games in recognition of his amazing achievement.

To make the most of extraordinary opportunities, church members must cultivate a marathon mindset. It can make the difference between finishing or failing, and it is the surest way to maximize achievement in the long run. One needs a positive attitude, an energetic demeanor and good intentions, to have what it takes to complete a long, demanding project.

Our parishioners are like marathon runners. They left the starting block in 1967 building a beautiful church edifice. The race continued in 1977 with addition of the Community Center. In 2004 we hit a new milestone with the construction of the Balis Center. We now have three buildings which service our people in many ways. Like Philippides, we have the goal in our sight. Completion is the object—reaching the line and knowing you gave it your all.

In order to sustain our buildings and our programs which are from cradle to coffin reaching all age groups, we rely on stewardship. It is a marathon. Our budget is \$500,000. With about 500 families in our parish, we each should think about contributing an amount commensurate with the needs of the parish.

The 2004 Olympics were held in Greece, birthplace of the Olympic Games. It was a spectacular setting for one of the most memorable competitions in many years. In the final event, the marathon, Vanderlei de Lima of Brazil was leading the race with just three miles to go. It was the strongest run of his career, and spectators were cheering him on with each stride. Suddenly a

crazy man burst into the track and forcefully grabbed de Lima, pulling him into the crowd. Security people quickly wrestled the man away, and a shaken de Lima returned to the race lane. But by then, he had lost his lead to Italy's Stephano Baldini and another runner. De Lima pressed on toward the goal. Baldini eventually captured the gold metal and de Lima finished third, winning the bronze. Professionally, it was his greatest disappointment; but personally, it was an amazing achievement. Rarely in Olympic history has the third place winner been more highly lauded, but everyone knew that Vanderlei de Lima was a winner because he had not given up.

So it is with our parishioners who develop this marathon mindset. Difficulties will come. Obstacles will block our path. Pitfalls lurk on all sides. Surprise attacks with threaten to put you out of the race. As a parishioner, as a steward of St. Thomas, you must never give up or give in. To all the stewards and pledging members of St. Thomas who have run the marathon and continue to sustain our spiritual home, allow me to resound the words of Jesus, "Well done, my good and faithful servants"

Fr. Emmanuel Pratsinakis