

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021**  
**Trinity 9 (B) – Choral Evensong**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Ecclesiasticus 42.15-end**  
**NT: Hebrews 11.17-31**

May I speak in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I've been trying to keep up with the Olympics- team GB have so far won 26 medals in Tokyo this year. (There might be more since I last checked). This is a combination of gold, silver and bronze medals, from individual competitors to team competitors. There are too many to mention, but these competitors are heroes of their sports and spend hours training and practising in order to be ready to represent Team GB.

Thinking about heroes, our passage from Hebrews this evening provides a list of heroes of the faith. We hear about Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and Rahab. They all demonstrated faith and perseverance in faith in different ways. Thinking about us as individuals and as a worshipping community- how do we train and prepare ourselves for our own journeys of faith. How do we root ourselves spiritually in order to try and stand firm in our faith, just as these heroes from the Old Testament did?

Yesterday was the feast of St Ignatius of Loyola- my absolute favourite saint. I encountered St Ignatius many years ago when I first went to Loyola Hall for a weekend individually guided retreat. Loyola Hall is now closed and I instead go to St Beuno's Jesuit retreat house in North Wales. Ignatius- was born in the Basque area of Spain. Ignatius was a soldier who was badly hurt in battle when a cannonball smashed into his legs and he was literally floored for a very long time. He spent his recovery time reading about the life of Jesus and the

Saints. This led him to have a deep desire to serve Jesus. The legacy of Ignatius is the society of Jesus- the Jesuits- whom he founded and his book- the spiritual exercises.

Ignatius points out the similarity of the growth in faith and service to getting physically fit. Just as our Team GB athletes have been training and practising hard in the run up to the Olympic games to ensure that they can perform at their very best, Ignatius believed that to grow in faith and service, one needs to do exercises. A process of prayer is given to strengthen appropriate emotional attachment to Jesus and respond to his personal call.

Ignatius provides three stages to the times of prayer or spiritual exercise. Stage one is the warming up and settling into prayer and asking for God's grace during your time of prayer. Ignatius suggests coming into the presence of God and imagining his loving gaze on you. Second is the active training- the spiritual exercise- which can be imaginative contemplation on a Bible passage or reflection and self-examination. This stage helps to become more deeply engaged with God in prayer. Stage three is the warming down- this is the time for reflection and conversation. This is looking back over the prayer time and then talking this through with God- which Ignatius calls the colloquy. This is a personal and reflective time and enables us to have a personal conversation with God, as if chatting with a friend about what has taken place for you during your time of prayer.

A further prayer that Ignatius taught is the Examen. This is the practice of looking back over your day and seeing where was God in it all. Trying to discern where God is working in our lives and directing us, helps us to grow and develop our faith. We can become further attuned to God's will for our lives. I find this an especially helpful practice. Added to this,

journaling helps to see where God has been at work in our lives. It helps us to remember that he has walked beside us in the past and continues to do so.

Having dipped into this world of St Ignatius and the spiritual exercises, I'd like to challenge us to maybe explore this for ourselves over the coming week. Or if this doesn't sound right for you, you could try to experience some other different forms of prayer. It is important for us, just as it is important for the Team GB athletes to train and to exercise it is important for us to train and to strengthen our prayer life and our walk with Jesus. Just as those Old Testament characters we heard about earlier all had a strong faith, we too should ensure that we strengthen our faith. We do this by regular spiritual exercises of prayer, contemplation, reflection and talking to God.

The Revd Jennifer Brady