

# 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

### August 17, 2025

Today's second reading from Hebrews is the second of four consecutive Sundays in which we hear an essentially uninterrupted commentary on faith from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> chapters of that Letter to the Hebrews. In summary, these readings assure us that faith overcomes life's seemingly insurmountable problems by God's power.

Last week we heard that faith is "...the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." (HEB 11:1) In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter, the author of Hebrews identifies what I'll refer to as the Old Testament "Communion of Saints;" those ancients who persevered and, through faith, overcame their earthly trials and tribulations: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Moses and Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel.

Yet, even these ancients, "though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised" (HEB 11:39) by God. "God had foreseen something better for us;" redemption through Jesus Christ, his Son. Only after the saving work of Christ did these ancients receive the fullness of redemption.

Just as these ancient witnesses persevered through faith, so today's reading encourages us to "**persevere in running the race** that lies before us," all the "while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith."

"Persevere in running the race." Upon reading these words in preparation for today, my mind immediately went back a few years ago when I was a young man of 53. I signed-up for my first half-marathon after being a NOT very successful cross-country runner in high school. Never having run for more than 5-kilometers in a day, my sister talked me into joining her in a half-marathon, only by saying that we'll run a mile then walk a mile and alternate for the entire 13.1 mile long race. Sounded reasonable.

We started the race together; however, in the massive crowd of over 17,000 runners, I lost my sister as I approached the one-mile mark. Therefore, I decided to keep running, just like Forrest Gump. Before I knew it, I was at the half-way mark, a little over 6.5 miles, with a time of just over an hour. At that point, I decided to "persevere in running the race." However, given my lack of preparatory training, my legs began to feel extremely heavy; I began to feel like Jeremiah, in our first reading, who was thrown in a cistern and began to sink into the mud.

But during that last half of the race, thousands of people were lining the racecourse, cheering on the runners—including me. You wouldn't believe the boost that I received from those miles-and-miles of the cheering throng, exhorting me on. I successfully finished my first half-marathon with a time of 2:01:14. You can actually look that up since, in this day of the internet, once something is out there, it's there forever.

That feeling of elation with the crowds cheering me on is just what I imagine it to be like with the "communion of saints" cheering us on. Each of us is "running the race" toward our salvation in Jesus. And the "communion of saints," those on earth and those who have died, in unity with Christ, are cheering us on that race toward our salvation. We can't see them, but they're there—our faithful ancestors, parents and grandparents, and all the saints of heaven—proud of every step we take, praying for us all the way. The "communion of saints" is not just feel-good idea; rather, it's one of the dogmas, the articles of faith, of the Catholic Church, which we profess in the Apostles Creed.

So, the next time you're feeling like Jeremiah, stuck in the mud at the bottom of a cistern, **have faith**, persevere and take heart; the "communion of saints" has got your back and is cheering you on as you "**persevere in running the race** that lies before you," all the "while keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith."