

## **Homily: Rt Rev Richard Moth, Catholic Bishop of the Forces**

*Joshua Camp on Monday 6 August 2012*

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Thank you, Bishop Thomas, for your warm welcome here this evening. It is very interesting that Bishop Thomas said nothing to me, or me to him, about what I was going to preach about this evening. And yet he picked up in his opening words on the wonderful athletic events that are taking place a few streets away even as we speak linked in with the Feast of the Transfiguration.

There is an extraordinary closeness with what we celebrate on this feast day and the Olympic Games, such as St Paul's writing about the pursuit of a wreath by athletes of a bygone age, but our own prize is one for something greater.

I would like, however, to link the Games to something else. This particular parish is very special as it is in a sense hosting the Games, like the parish of Bow in Westminster and the parish of Greenwich, in Southwark, as well as parishes in places such as Wembley and Weymouth that are also now hosting these great events.

We are people who welcome the Games into our communities. Our task is to make people feel at home, not merely by meeting them but through prayer. The fact that we come before the Lord in adoration throughout the day and night, and we hear of so many young people meeting at the Joshua Camp less than a mile away, will have a far greater influence on the Games than any of us can see. It is important to see what is going on in silence around the Olympic Park. It is important to also note all the organisers and volunteers that sacrificially give of themselves to make such an exciting event as the Games happen.

What you are engaged in in this prayerful support is at the heart of this great feast. It is like struggling up the mountain to see the Lord in all his glory. I wonder what was happening in the minds of Peter, James and John. What did they think Jesus was meaning when he spoke about going up Mount Tabor, if that is the actual place where the Transfiguration actually took place?

There are 22 hairpin bends heading up Mount Tabor - even in a dodgy taxi! So, for three fishermen used to the Sea of Galilee now called to be mountain climbers, they would have been challenged by such a journey. But how worth it to make this journey and see the Transfigured Lord and through this experience to gain the strength they would need to go through the events of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. They didn't understand what was going on until after the resurrection. It is like that for our journey too. Many of the events in our lives we don't understand but only when we reflect on the resurrection of Christ do they have any meaning. And this is where the Games enter in.

If you are one of the privileged few with tickets, you will come face to face with people striving to be their best after years of training for something that takes only a little time - less than 10 seconds in some cases - and for some this requires constant struggle and striving. This is very much what the Christian life is often like. Lots of questions and difficulties surrounded by people who don't always understand what we are about. The reward, however, is much more than 10 seconds of sporting glory but eternal life itself.

Thirty years ago, Pope John Paul II came to these islands. I was honoured to read the gospel at Wembley stadium the evening that he was there. (My cousins are at Wembley tonight watching Olympic soccer.) John Paul II had an extraordinary vision of the human person which we know today as the Theology of the Body. The fact that God has created us makes us wonderful. In a dramatic way the Olympics symbolise this: the pursuit of personal and team excellence, a living and vibrant expression of the human person. The achievements we see in the Games are way beyond what we may ever achieve and yet we see there the wonder of the human being. And it is seeing the wonder of the human being that we see the wonder of God. It is important to keep a grasp of that. We can be taken up by the razzmatazz but what we see there is not just someone rowing fast or running well but an expression of the glory of God. This brings us back to today's feast.

The Lord shows his disciples the promise held out to each one of us. As we move on to the more extraordinary endeavours in the Paralympic Games, what we celebrate there is not more sport but the glory of God fully alive and manifest in the human person. As we share this experience with one another let us pray that the world will see not only sport, as wonderful as it is, but the glory of God. If this happens then the Olympics will not just transform those who participate and watch but will draw all people into a close encounter with the Lord of glory who is life itself.