

'Run so as to win'

At the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China, Michael Phelps won eight gold medals and set seven world records, giving him the most gold medals of any modern Olympic athlete, with a total of 14. Michael Phelps never rests on his laurels until he has won the race. We should have the same attitude. The great evangelizer St. Paul did. He showed the highest degree of commitment and perseverance in his race toward the spiritual finish line and he exhorts us to imitate him. He calls us to exercise discipline; to train our minds and our bodies; to play by the rules, to compete well so as to win the race that Christ sets before us: "Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor 9: 24-27)

What we have seen in Michael Phelps' story of success, we see in the life of holiness and fruitful evangelization of St. Paul. Both made every effort to develop self-mastery so as to reach their clearly-defined goal: to win, to come out ahead, to set a world record! So must we, given that we are pursuing an imperishable crown, a lasting prize: life on high with Jesus Christ, after a life of holiness on earth.



MARTHA
FERNÁNDEZ-
SARDINA

Of course, this is a life-long process, but we must begin today, no matter where we are in the race: "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:10-14)

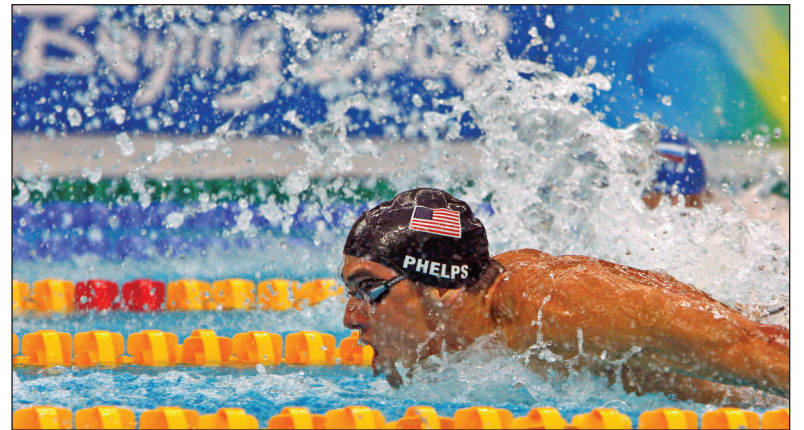
We must begin and continue our spiritual training by taking seriously our own conversion: our adherence to the Lord, our taking on his mind and attitude, our continuously ridding ourselves of all that is not Christ-like, as holy Scripture says: "...let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin." (Heb 12:1-4)

Seriously-committed athletes

win gold. Seriously-committed Christians become saints, fully Christ-like. We should make it our goal then to run so as to win and not ruin our chances of winning the everlasting and unfading crown of glory! We must firmly resolve to win by competing well, according to the rules. What are the rules, you may ask? Christ has set before us the "rules of the game." He has entrusted revealed truth to the church he established as *mater et magistra*, that is, as mother and teacher, to guide us into the fullness of truth. Through the church, Christ teaches us and exemplifies what it means to be a Christian disciple, to be a child of God, to be fully human as the Vatican Council states: "Christ reveals man to man himself, and makes his supreme calling clear." (Gaudium et spes, 22)

As we continue to deepen our knowledge of the faith and perfect our practice of the teachings of Christ, we increase our appreciation for the rules of the game that enable us to win. This energizes us to strive daily to live our lives according to what the church teaches, making every effort to engage in the affairs of public life with a Catholic mindset and live according to the moral and ethical demands of the Gospel, making the Word of God come alive in our personal, family and public lives as Catholics.

There are a number of concrete steps that help us "train" well for the "race," including personal and communal prayer; studying the *Catechism of the*



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Michael Phelps competes during his team's victory in the men's 4x100-meter medley relay at the Beijing Olympics. He won a record eight gold medals there.

Catholic Church, reading and meditating on holy Scripture, receiving the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation frequently, serving others, and in other ways nurturing our faith and sharing it with others, for as Pope John Paul II said: "Missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!" (Redemptoris missio, 2)

Indeed, in the words of Archbishop José H. Gomez, we are called to be "ambassadors of faith, heralds of hope and messengers of love."

During this Jubilee Year, St. Paul urges us to take an honest and thoughtful look at our lives to see where we stand, lest we fool ourselves: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" (1 Cor 13:5-6)

One thing is certain: only the hardworking make it to the finish line successfully. The

victory is assured to those who know what they want and how to get there — and work hard at it. The good thing is that God is on our side! He has every desire to bestow upon each and every one of us his grace and power so that we might achieve the very heights of holiness. He is for us! Therefore, let us aim high. Let us "go for the gold"! The Olympian motto is *Citius, Altius, Fortius* (Faster, Higher, Stronger). Make this motto your own as you keep and share the faith, so that you may say with St. Paul at the end of your life: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim 4: 7)

MARTHA FERNÁNDEZ-SARDINA IS THE archdiocesan Office for Evangelization and an international bilingual speaker and teacher. She previously served as archdiocesan Director for Evangelization for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. Rosa Mera serves as the assistant to the director of the Office for Evangelization and is a member of the Marian Community of Reconciliation.

An open letter to U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi on when life begins

Dear Madam Speaker: You have served in the United States House of Representatives for 21 years now and became in 2007 the first woman ever elected to be Speaker of the House. Your service in national politics has been long; your dedication, recognized. You are by birth and continued choice an American Catholic.

But I feel I should respond to the injudicious remark which you made to Tom Brokaw on NBC-TV on Aug. 24. Brokaw, in an interview with you concerning various issues arising in the present presidential race, asked you what was your view on when human life begins. You answered: "As an ardent, practicing Catholic, this is an issue that I have studied for a long time. What I know is over the centuries, the doctors of the church have not been able to make that definition. St. Augustine said [it was] at three months. We don't know.... No one can tell when human life begins.... The point is that it shouldn't have an impact on the woman's right to choose."



FATHER
JOHN A. LEIES,
SM, STD

You said that "This is an issue that I have studied for a long time." But if you really had studied the issue in depth, you would have known your an-

swer insinuated an error. The exact time when a human being first becomes "human" has never been officially declared by the Catholic Church, that is true. Three centuries before Christ, the pagan Greek philosopher Aristotle opined that the human soul entered the body some 40-80 days after conception (when the body developed enough to accommodate the soul).

Some early Christian thinkers accepted the theory of Aristotle (as a theory). Others did not, claiming that God gave the human soul to the human body at the first moment of existence. But — and this is the important point to note, since your remark was made in the context of the abortion issue — no church doctor,

St. Augustine or any other one, ever agreed that abortion was permitted — even if the human soul had not yet been given. Thus there may have been differing opinions in the church concerning the precise moment when the soul was given, but there were no differences concerning the immorality of abortion at any time during a human's prenatal existence. This teaching of the Catholic Church remains the same today as in every past century of its history.

With the advent of modern biology, we know a lot more about the precise moment of humanness, even more since 1973 and *Roe v. Wade*. It is when the human egg is fertilized by the human sperm. When the two elements have fused you have a new human entity. Any biologist will tell you that. The embryo does not become "human" later on; it is human from the beginning. Does the embryo at that moment have a human soul? We do not know with absolute certainty. It is a consensus of Catholic theologians that it does. But whether or not, the new human must be respected as human and protected as such. Its proper, unique des-

tiny — determined by God — is to grow and develop as a human. To deliberately stop that process is wrong, terribly wrong. There is no moral right to choose to do it.

And also, Ms. Pelosi, I wish you had not made the claim that you are "an ardent Catholic," because your position on abortion seems to belie that claim. You stated to Brokaw that the argument about the beginning of human life "shouldn't have an impact on the woman's right to choose." You are wrong; it should! The right of a mother to choose to kill her child denies the right of a child to life. You cannot support that position and be an "ardent" Catholic!

I know that several cardinals of the church in America and several archbishops have already addressed these concerns to you. I add one more voice — a less official one — with the hope that the various appeals will move you to reconsider your position.

FATHER JOHN A. LEIES, SM, STD, is president emeritus of St. Mary's University and former head of the Theology Department there.