

Sermon Summary
6th after Epiphany
12th February 2012

- We are all being encouraged to look forward to the Olympics.
- The people at Corinth knew the Isthmian games, held every two years, at which the athletes competed for a prize of (depending on the source) a wreath of laurel or wild celery. Sponsorship was not what it is now.
- Paul uses this familiarity to talk about what later writers have called spiritual exercises, another athletic image.
- He makes a number of points
- There is a need for self-control or discipline
- There is a need for focus. Athletes train specifically for their events to build the strengths they need. It should be the same for us.
- Although the word “punish” is used on our translations, this does not mean exercise which damages: that would be counter-productive. Too often Christian discipline in the ascetic tradition, when over-zealously applied, becomes damage, not an aid to growth. It is growth that our regime should encourage- not a denial of our humanity.
- Exercise is focused on the right goal: Paul, in the Corinthian correspondence, reminds his audience that the goal of the spiritual life should be to promote reconciliation (healing the rifts between people and God, and people and their neighbours). What does not promote that falls short, in his estimation.
- Lent is not a time for weight loss or any other “good ends”, but for a building up of what promotes reconciliation.
- Paul does not say what the exercise regime demands, but we could safely include prayer, dealing with our temptations or weaknesses, study of Scripture and tradition within our regime as we need them.
- We can also use the time to break our damaging learned behaviours and teach ourselves new ways of responding to what unsettles us.

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