

This week professional sports throughout the nation stopped. Many of the athletes refused to play games as a protest of the killing of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin. This homily isn't directly about that protest or evaluating that situation. Rather, I want to look at my reaction to the stoppage of the professional sports. The press presented this protest as, "Athletes take control of sports from owners and money people to let their voices be heard!" I suppose that's true. And I'm not questioning the athletes' sincerity or judging the righteousness of the work-stoppage. But the stoppage was the occasion when I noticed something about myself.

I follow sports – read the sports page each day. I'm not a die-hard fan, but I stay engaged. I think for me sports provide a distraction, something to take my mind off real life. But I've noticed that sports' place in my life has changed during Covid time. For months there were no sports. That seemed really odd at the time. The sports page was empty. Sports have sort of come back, but now I find I just don't care

about them. This week when the NBA playoffs stopped, when the MLB and MLS games didn't happen, when basketball players were discussing ending the season, I couldn't have cared less. I wasn't upset. I was just . . . play, don't play, whatever.

Part of this might be that sports don't provide a real distraction from the crazy world anymore. They are full of coronavirus news – bubbles, positive test results, games cancelled due to the virus. Most sports news seems to be as much commentary on the virus and the protests as on strategy and scores anyway.

But I think a deeper reason for my new apathy is that these times have put sports in the proper perspective for me. I was always a college football fan. But if there isn't a college football season this year – that's fine. And the same goes for organized sports for high schools and younger kids. I want them to get exercise. I've never been anti-sports. But it's not the end of the world if seasons are cancelled and select teams are disbanded. In fact, it might be a good thing. There was a time

a short while ago when the thought of cancelling Pro sports playoffs would have seemed IMPORTANT to me. But it's not important. That's my point. Deep down the coronavirus has convinced me sports don't matter. And I feel this is a silver-lining of the virus. The chaos might be teaching us what matters -- and what doesn't.

“Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” Most Americans in the last fifty years have been shielded from the violence of history. Not all, a minority have been engaged in our wars, etc. And, certainly, there has been personal violence within our society and people have faced natural disasters, etc. But when I think back to those generations who lived through world wars, plagues, the Great Depression – we, I, have had it easy. Perhaps that is ending. And it will rearrange our priorities.

What's it worth? Is it worth it? Does it really matter? Those are all questions Jesus wants us to ask ourselves about how were spending

our lives. He tells His disciples today in the gospel they must take up their crosses. They will have to lose their old lives. (Some of us have already been losing bits of our former lives these past months). To follow Him will be more important than acquiring the world and all its treasures combined. St. Augustine once said, “Christ is not valued at all unless He is valued above all.” Jesus is telling us He is the measure of all things. He is the standard against which are to assess the worth of everything we seek, do, and are.

How that going? We fill our time, brains, and dreams with so much that is of little or no value. And obviously it's more than sports. It's promotions, entertainments, petty ambitions, trinkets. I still leaf through the sports page – but mostly out of habit. After a vaccine is found maybe my interest in sports will return – but probably not. I believe that we're being given in this time and crisis a chance to reflect on God and the world – or more precisely on God or the world. And

that is a gift God is giving us, even if we would not have asked for it; a mercy that God is showing us – even if a severe mercy.

So here are some things to think about today in the sixth month of the coronavirus: What has disappeared from our lives or dropped in value during this time of testing? If we could, would it be good for us to seek a return of those things? My point is, let us be intentional and cautious about resuming old ways and priorities. Maybe God took them out of our lives for a purpose. What has become less important to us over these six months? What has become more important? Is Jesus pleased with those changes? And is the chaos, stress, and strife of these times purifying our lives or dissolving them?

“What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” As Jesus tells us today, His judgement is coming when we will receive the fulfillment of our choices in life. Whether you agree with them or not, the pro athletes who stopped playing their games this week wanted to focus on something they believed was more

important. Let us examine our own priorities and choices and ask, what are they worth? Does what I'm doing in this one life I've been given really matter to me and God? Or am I just spending my life distracted by the world? Let's stop playing the silly games we play and concentrate on what Jesus tells us is really important.