



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

Office for Ethnic Chaplaincies and Eastern Catholic Churches
Co-ordinator: Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Preparation in Chaos

Reflection for the 12th Week of the Year

21 June 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Even the hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Mt 10:30)

Today is Wednesday 17 June: England has its first World Cup Game tonight. The country is getting ready before 9 pm and praying, yes praying for an England win against Croatia. Things are not looking good according to the Press: the England Squad is fighting for their lives in USA according to the Sun Post: already there has been a severe tornado; storm warnings; an earthquake that has not happened since the 1800s; heat strokes; violence. With all these biblical punishments it seems the world doesn't want England to win according to the Sun!

Given this scenario, it was good to hear an item on the Radio 4 on Sunday Religious Affairs Programme dealing with Faith and Sport this past Sunday.



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Like me, you will have noticed many players making gestures of prayer and the sign of the Cross at various points in big games. It has become more acceptable; according to the Programme some 75% of players are Christian in first Team Squads, and many players are ready to express their Faith on the pitch. This is in fact due to Christian Players coming in from abroad and because they are respected as players, their Faith is acceptable too.

Indeed, as we are aware, the stadiums of many teams are almost places of worship: fans spread ashes of loved ones there, and marriages takes place there too!

So, how does the Church view sport? There has been a lot of interest in Pope Leo's attitude given his own sporting activities. Indeed before the Winter Olympics Milano Cortina this year he issued a letter 'Life in Abundance' on the value of sport. Deborah Lubov of Vatican News in an article entitled "Pope: Sport is important for humanity", says "he begins the letter on the occasion of the XXV Winter Olympics 6-22 February, and the XIV Paralympic Games 6-15 March... to greet and extend his good wishes to those directly involved, while also offering everyone a reflection.

In this text, the Holy Father praises sport and reflects on the many ways it fosters human fraternity and helps individuals pursue what is good and holy." Leo recalled that during past Olympic Games his predecessors



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emphasised the important role sport can play for the good of humanity, particularly in promoting peace. “In a world thirsting for peace” Pope Leo says, “we need tools that can put an end to the abuse of power, displays of force and indifference to the rule of law.”

Reflecting on sport, Lubov writes, the Pope also reminds the Church to be pastorally present in the realm of sport and to offer accompaniment, discernment and hope. He says sport can truly become a school of life, teaching that abundance does not come from victory at any cost, but from sharing, respecting others, and the joy of journeying together. Lubov concludes the article saying “Throughout the letter, Pope Leo warns against the exploitation of sport for political or financial gain, urging instead to remain faithful to its mission of serving personal development and the common good.”

As I continue writing this Reflection on Thursday morning, 18 June, I am doing so in the light of England winning the match against Croatia. The joy that brought to fans and the whole community cannot be doubted – the celebrations at the local pubs could be heard at some distance last night! So, my eyes turn to the ‘memory wall’ in my living room and the picture of our English College Rugby XV – we had made it to the pages of the Universe newspaper March 1966 with the grand title “Ambassadors of the Church, of Britain... and of Rugby.” The friendships formed way back in those days has



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remained as one of the great outcomes of sport. The other in our special situation was our role as ambassadors of the Church: the Italians and English Teams going out to Italy saw another side of students for the Priesthood, the human side that opened the door to conversations about our Faith and way of life.

The Ambassador role is one highlighted on the Feast of the Birth of St John the Baptist celebration this coming week. John was the one who pointed to the Messiah so effectively; we will feel inferior beside him, especially in pointing the way to the Lord, but Jesus reminds us that those who ‘acknowledge’ Him before men, He will acknowledge before his Father in heaven. Our witness to him, even if it’s no more than a sign of the Cross or a brief prayer, like the footballers, truly matters. As Jesus says ‘in the Gospel this weekend “not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father... even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”

The challenge of the Gospel lies before us this coming week: ‘What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops”.

St John the Baptist pray for us.

Amen.