

# All That Glitters Is Not Gold

## THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY & BLESSING OF GRAPES

The Olympic games came to a close this past Sunday evening and—with the exception of sports like run walking and duet artistic swimming—the kids and I found them fun to watch. As always the Olympics aren't just about sports, they reflect our common culture and values, as well as those which divide us. There was lots of talk of environmentally and economically sustainable Olympics. There were Olympic officials fired for politically incorrect comments. And of course there was the battle between protestors and patriots.

It's a big world out there, so we should be surprised that not everyone is on the same page about everything. But if we are looking for unity, there is one value that unites the entire world during the Olympics, and that is the value of gold. Everybody wants Gold. Everybody wants first place. The US squeaked out 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Olympic gold medal count with 39 golds, but just one ahead of China with 38. And of course this race for number one is not just about who can flip around the most times before they land in the water. This is about who is first place in the world in economic influence, military power and education. That is the age old competition which rages to this day; and all of the nations want to come out on top. Being first is such a deeply held human value, that we don't even think about it. But beware of those values we aren't conscious of, for those just might end up taking over our lives.

On the surface, there is no problem with seeking first place, as long as we are aware on a deeper level that all that glitters is not gold. First, this is literally true. Do you know what the Olympic gold medal is made of? 92.5% silver and just 1.34% gold. It is almost exactly the same as a silver medal! The gold medal literally is not gold, but neither is coming in first place all it's cracked up to be. First place comes with tremendous cost, both for super-powers countries and their super athletes. Super powers must give lives to defend their territories just as super athletes give their lives to defend their title. Super powers face division and unrest when they fall from first place, super athletes face depression and loss of purpose when they get knocked off the top.

Indeed all that glitters is not gold, and where did this gold medal come from anyway? Well it was not from the original Greek Olympics, whose first place prize which was not a gold medal but a laurel wreath. These crowns of flowers are splendidly beautiful today, but they are gone tomorrow—a wise reminder that all things pass; wealth, power and fame, and truly all that glitters is not gold. Our most wise teacher agrees. 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal,' instructs Jesus, 'but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Mt. 6:19-21

For us followers of Jesus, gold, first place is reserved for God alone. If we want peace and joy in life, give up the podium to God. For in giving first place to God, we give up pride, envy, anger, greed and all of the dark sides of the ancient human quest for gold. Now there is nothing wrong with striving to be the best in whatever we do, but the order of our striving is of utmost importance. If you wish, strive to be the best runner in the world. But like Eric Liddell, the Scottish Olympian in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, strive to be the best runner in the world for the glory of God.

Today's blessing of the grapes and feast of Mary is the Armenian Church's yearly reminder of who belongs in first place. In the blessing of the grapes we adhere to God's ancient commandment that whatever is first, first born child, first born animal, first fruits of the harvest, these belong to God. As grapes were always the first fruit of the harvest in Armenia, we give thanks by giving back to the Lord of the harvest. In the blessing of grapes we give first place back to God.

And as with all commandments of our loving God, he does not ask us to do anything that he did not do himself. God followed his own rule of offering up his first-fruits, his first born to the world. 'God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, writes Paul in today's reading, 'to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.' Gal 4:5. Through the humble obedience of Mary, God offered up his first born son, Jesus, as the first

fruit of a totally new order, where and the one who is greatest is the one who serves most Mt 23:11 and 'the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.' Mt: 20:16

And so today as we bless the first fruits of the harvest, let us recall that all that glitters is not gold, and that first place must always be reserved for God alone. For with our Lord firmly in place atop the podium of our lives, there is no limit to what we might achieve and who we are to become in the shadow of his glory, now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.