

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we praise your name, and join their unending hymn...

- We are not alone:
- As we gather, we gather with all the holy ones of God
- Who, together with us, look to Christ
- Who draws us into the glorious presence of God.
- Let's hear this good news from Hebrews
- As we hear and rehear the words from God's word
- That encourage us to persevere in faith.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...

- In Chapter 11 we have been hearing
- About those who have lived by faith
- From Abel to Abraham to Moses, to Gideon to Samuel
- And we have heard of those who have *suffered* for the faith.
- These people are not dead and long gone
- They are alive in Christ, and they surround us
- As a great cloud of witnesses:
- As people who can tell us what it means to run the course of faith
- To run a race: that's the imagery that will be developed:
- A picture: we see those who have run the race before us
- Waiting before the finish line so that we can cross it with them
- As human beings we have strength to persevere
- Through the presence and encouragement of others:
- So picture running the race
- Surrounded by those who encourage you to finish together...

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...

- The imagery: athletes divesting themselves of all that impedes
- As spiritual athletes on the race set before us
- We can lay aside the things that impede us
- Things that *weigh us down* spiritually: Jesus said: **Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap.** Luke 21:34
- Being weighed down drinking alcohol to excess
- Dissipating our time: endless entertainment
- Living with a narrative of worry in our minds.
- Practically speaking: simply having a regular time of prayer...
- Also, laying aside sin: not specified: we can fill in the blanks.
- Practically speaking: confessing our sin
- The sin that we have done.
- We lay this aside by confessing to God *and to others*
- There is a communal aspect
- And receiving forgiveness.
- Also laying aside the sin that has been done to us:
- Forgiving others.
- God's word gives us power to do this:
- The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Matthew 18:23-35
- A parable that can work on us as spiritual medicine.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...*

- It is not the cloud of witnesses that are our focus
- Or our laying aside every weight and sin
- But it is *Jesus*, who has won the race
- And who stands on the other side of the finishing line
- Our ability to persevere comes from looking to Jesus
- Think about St Peter on the water, and the wind and the waves
- It is Jesus who calls us out of chaos
- Who calls us across the finish line.
- Practically speaking: where we literally focus our eyes
- Think even of the layout of this church building:
- The focus is on Jesus, and his word to us.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, *who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame...*

- Jesus endured the worst kind of public shaming:
- Rejected, mocked, spat upon, stripped naked, nailed to a cross.
- But he had as his goal the victory ahead
- And so disregarded the shame of the cross.
- The cross was intended by those who inflicted it
- To make Jesus a nobody, to make sure that he
- And all he represented
- Would be swallowed up in death forever.
- But the cross won for us the forgiveness of sins,
- And the gift of the resurrection of the body,
- A gift we share through baptism into him.
- So we are not repelled by the shame Christ suffered
- We are drawn to the love that we see there
- More than this, we confess that Jesus' death was not the end
- But gateway to the resurrected life.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, *who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

- If we look at our own performance, we might want to give up,
- But the one who has completed his race
- Is seated at the right hand of the Father:
- We see the outcome of the life of faith,
- And as we gather with Jesus as our focus,
- We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses:
- By angels and archangels
- And the whole company of heaven.
- So, **let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.**
- Amen!