Marist Core Values: Don't Leave Home Without Them!

A reflection on living our faith in simplicity, humility, and as if hidden and unknown in the world on the football field and beyond.

While standing on the sidelines of our football games, I winced more than once at the hard tackling that is part and parcel of playing football. This year's Marist core values of simplicity, humility, and being hidden and unknown in the world seem to have little connection with a sport whose language includes quarterbacks throwing bombs, receivers getting drilled, teams lining up in formation as would an army, ball carriers rambling or slashing through the opposing defense, and defenders blitzing, etc. So then, in what way do these Marist core values fit into a sport that is inclined to see these values as a sign of weakness and utterly incompatible with playing and winning a football game, let alone a state championship? The same question could apply to playing any sport or succeeding in life.

Well, let me take a stab at it.

So, what does it look like to play football and be humble at the same time? The virtue of humility calls us to admit that others may be better than ourselves at doing something. Marist School encourages all of us to strive for excellence, which is good. However, without practicing humility, being able to congratulate a team that has gotten the better of us, and being able to admit that another teammate can do something better than ourselves, what are we left with? If we leave the Marist core value of humility at home when we walk onto the football or practice field, we become angry, resentful, or bitter when faced with defeat or disappointment. When that happens, this little corner of the universe called Marist School becomes meaner, lonelier, colder, and darker.

By the way, the same Marist core value of humility also applies to being victorious. To be humble in victory is to be gracious towards the team that has lost. It is to have compassion toward the players on the losing team. They, too, have practiced long and hard. Now their hopes of winning the game or a championship have been dashed. If we leave the Marist core value of humility at home when we walk onto the football field, then, when victorious, our facial features will be contorted into a sneer or frozen with contempt, and from our lips will come trash-talking and words meant to rub it in. This little corner of the universe becomes meaner, lonelier, darker, and colder when that happens.

So, what does it look like to play football as if hidden and unknown at the same time? Whomever wins the Heisman Trophy will invariably thank his parents, coaches, and teammates, without whom he would never be in this position in the first place. The Heisman winner brings to the forefront all those who contributed to his becoming the player and person he has become. He is practicing the Marist core value of being "hidden and unknown." He purposefully and correctly "hides" behind everyone who has contributed to his receiving this award and gives them the credit they deserve.

Living as if hidden and unknown in the world will sound like the player who thanks his teammates and coaches who combined to put him in the position to score the winning touchdown. It will sound like the quarterback who willingly assumes more responsibility in defeat and deflects all the praise to his teammates in victory.

If we leave the Marist core value of being hidden and unknown at home when we walk onto the football field, we run the risk of absorbing all the limelight and leaving in its wake a dark hole filled with the hurt and resentment of our teammates. This little corner of the universe becomes meaner, lonelier, darker, and colder when that happens.

So, what does playing football and practicing the Marist core value of simplicity look like? I like to link the Marist core value of simplicity with this beatitude from Matthew's Gospel: "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God." (Mt. 5:8) Isn't it true that we only see what we want or can see? I can see the defense get in position during a football game, but I don't see what the quarterback sees. He knows what to look for that will cue him into where the blitz will come from, which receiver will be left uncovered, and which one to throw to. He can anticipate how a particular play will unfold and act accordingly. What looks complicated and incomprehensible to me is relatively simple to a quarterback who knows what to look for.

The same is true spiritually. If I only see how I can advance my interests and priorities in every situation, I will not know what to look for that will clue me in about what God is asking of me. Because I look primarily at my interests, I won't "see" God's. To live our faith in simplicity is to simplify our motives so that in all that we see and do, we serve God's purposes and not our own. If we live like that, we will "see" God. That, by the way, is easier said than done, and it is done only with the help of God's grace.

To practice the Marist core values of simplicity and humility while living as if hidden and unknown in the world is to see the game of life through the lens of faith. We will know what to look for that will tell us what God is up to and what God is asking of us, whether in victory or defeat or revealing to us through our success or failure.

The Marist core values are to inform every aspect of our lives. We are to take them with us and bring them home, to school, to work, to the football field, to the basketball court, to the soccer field, to the stage, etc. If we don't, their absence will be felt, and our little corner of the world where we live, work, learn, and play will become meaner, lonelier, colder, and darker. That is equivalent to not taking God with us. And when God is left behind, our souls will notice the chill.

Marist core values: don't leave home without them. Take them with you to the football field and beyond.