

“They will run and not grow weary”

~Isaiah 40:31

by Mr. Christopher J. Ryan, SJ



After training for four months and over 500 miles, braving all the caprices of a New England winter, I met two friends in Boston on Marathon Monday for the bus ride to Hopkinton.

Thousands gathered there for the start of the annual event and traded stories of training, past experiences of running Boston and their reasons for toeing the line this year.

I'm ordinarily very serious about my racing, and I have approached past marathons rather methodically.

Yet the magic of Boston opened me to unprecedented joys, and it reminded me that ultimately I run to revel in the life it gives me.

Coming through Hopkinton, Ashland and Framingham in the early miles, I lost count of how many high-fives I shared with kids lining the course. After enthusiastic cheers in Natick from my school's president—and the women of Wellesley College—I was elated and smiling, something I had never experienced at the halfway point of a marathon.

As I neared mile 17, anticipating the Newton hills, I was lifted up by more than just the rising topography. For four tough miles, one long hill each, we were carried by the cheers, screams, signs and enthusiasm of crowds four to six deep on both sides of Commonwealth Avenue. Just beyond the final summit, the spires of Boston College came into view, followed by hundreds of the school's students whose supportive cheers and infectious enthusiasm sped my descent into the city itself.

The grueling miles along Beacon Street saw my focus narrow to the simple tasks of maintaining my pace and resisting temptations to yield to pain and fatigue—a microcosm of my struggles to maintain hope and confidence amid a difficult first year as a middle school teacher.

Digging deep physically as I ran through the deafening roar of the crowd in Kenmore Square, I felt a new surge of spiritual energy, and the words of St. Ignatius' prayer “Take, Lord, and receive...” became my mantra through the final blocks down Boylston Street.

These vignettes of the 26.2-mile pilgrimage from Hopkinton to Boston continue to gladden my heart. On a deeper level, I remember and appreciate the support and companionship of my Jesuit community, the numerous runners I met over the weekend, and the presence of two longtime friends.

Amid my journey as a Jesuit in formation, training for and completing the Boston Marathon is a consoling reminder of my capacity to walk some longer roads, to strive for deeper companionship and to maintain steadfast devotion. Whether the weariness I encounter along the way is physical, mental or spiritual, I continually hear the words of Isaiah echoing with the footfalls of my stride: “They who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength... they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.”



Congratulations to Chris Ryan, SJ, for completing the Boston Marathon on April 19 in under three hours. Chris is teaching at Nativity School of Worcester during his regency.