

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF FAITH FORMATION

April 16, 2023

Swimming and the Spiritual Life: Obedience

Some of you know that I grew up in competitive swimming. I swam for Coastal Maine Aquatics year-round from age eight to eighteen and for Cheverus High School during the school season. When I graduated and went to college, I chose not to swim and volunteered coaching a public high school team instead. For a good fifteen years, I was in the pool or on the deck two hours a day, five to six days a week, eleven months out of the year. Those of you familiar with the effects of chlorine will understand the chemical glow and the particular fragrance that comes with that amount of pool time.

Suffice to say that swimming was an important part of my life. There were life lessons I learned from my time in the sport. Some of those life lessons carried over into my spiritual life. Over the next few weeks, I'd like to share some of those with you.

First lesson: it's amazing how much progress you can make by just doing what you're told.

When I started out in the pool, I was no instant prodigy. Hand/foot/head to eye coordination didn't come naturally to me. Besides, I had a great love for food (still do, honestly) and this gave me a portly stature for an eight year old



that didn't work to my competitive advantage. By contrast, some of my teammates were much more invested in the sport than myself. They would work out outside practice. They would even lay off the sweets during swim meets. Unsurprisingly, my more ambitious teammates had the faster times.

The one thing I had going for me (at least at that point in my swim career) was that I did what I was told. In the world of swimming, there are ways to cut corners; for instance, making a U-turn in your lane when your coach isn't looking, or pulling on the lane line, or deciding you have a cramp when you're really just tired. I generally avoided those options and just did the sets as my coach asked me to. It took three years of plugging along like that, but around age eleven, I started seeing the fruit. My times dropped fast; I went from being in the middle of the pack to the front and even got a few age group records. This didn't come from going above and beyond; it was the fruit of just doing what I was supposed to be doing.



The same is true of the spiritual life. It is easy to look at the lives of the saints and think that we have to aim at heroics in order to be holy. In fact, just doing what God tells you will carry you far. Avoid sin, attend Mass, abstain from meat on Fridays, pray every day, and resolve to do God's will when it becomes known to you. It doesn't seem like much, but if you hold to that routine, you'll see the fruit in time.

—Joe Moreshead