

You might have seen or heard recently that Pope Francis came for a visit. What a grace filled moment in the Catholic Church and in our country! It is hard to not be both encouraged and challenged by his words and his witness.

In his homily at the [Mass at Madison Square Garden](#), he reminded us that “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”.

His visit prompted me to recall a new movie, [Woodlawn](#), that is to be released on October 16. It is a story about a high school in Birmingham, AL where there is significant racial division. The story recounts how the football team of Tony Nathan, former NFL and Alabama running back, provided a vehicle with which their community could reconcile and come to believe in one another.

There is a scene in the movie where one of the characters says, “This is what happens when God shows up”.

There is a sense of hope and belief pervading those who participated in the various stops of the papal visit. Even for those of us who only experienced it through the media, both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Because in so many ways the Holy Father embodies that light of Christ – whether spending time with the poor or world leaders. He shared words of encouragement, joy, hope, responsibility for one another. He talked of a need for encounter that we all have.

There are divisions all around us. How do we come to a place of reconciliation and community? In [Woodlawn](#), a preacher poses the question, “If you only love those that love you back then what kind of love is that?”

Indeed. Pope Francis talked of being people of hope, “a hope which is unafraid of involvement, which acts as a leaven wherever we happen to live and work.” That somehow we are to bring our gifts to bear on the world, to reach beyond ourselves, to perhaps even make ourselves uncomfortable so that we might encounter God in the exchange.

He assures us that God is with us, He is in our midst. “He removes us from the fray of competition and self-absorption, and he opens before us the path of peace. That peace which is born of accepting others, that peace which fills our hearts whenever we look upon those in need as our brothers and sisters.” It is important to recognize that ‘needs’ are not always those of a material nature.

How do we bring that spirit of “encounter” to CYO Athletics? First, is to recognize that we are one community as we gather for competition. Secondly, is to welcome by word and action, those we share the experience with. Lastly, it is to go beyond ourselves.

For the following two weekends, at our Cross Country Meets at Woodland Park, participants and families will have the opportunity to bring canned food to benefit the [Food Bank](#) at St. Mary’s. We hope that everyone will review the materials and make a difference in the lives of others by contributing.

And while this effort is significant, we are challenged that it is not enough to make a difference in one moment, we are called by Pope Francis to transform ourselves and our community by how we encounter others. Is there a soup kitchen that we can volunteer at, a shelter we can support with our time and expertise, or maybe our parish has a St. Vincent de Paul Society where we can give of ourselves to the clients who stop by? Is there a way for us to involve our families or teams in a cause where we can experience the light of Christ in others?

On behalf of the almost 400 soccer teams and 3000+ cross country runners at Woodland Park, Lake Sammamish State Park and Bellarmine Prep participating this fall, I pray that in CYO Athletics we might reflect the joy and hope of Christ for our young people so that there is an encounter such that those who participate might say, "This is what happens when God shows up."

Blessings,

Tauno