

## Thought for the week: A shared race

Have you ever seen the delight on the faces of a winning relay running team? The joy is all the greater for being shared. Even defeat shared is less bitter!

The writer to the Hebrews likens the Christian life to a race, stretching out into the distance before us. We need stamina and determination to complete our leg of the relay and we need to be team players, encouraging those who run with us, and accepting help from them.

Some people run much better as part of a relay team than they do in individual races and it is easy to see why. There is strength to be gained from those running with you or from being cheered on by those on the sidelines – even more so if they are not just spectators but people who understand what it is to run in a race.

According to today's reading from Hebrews, there is a 'great cloud of witnesses' who have run previous legs of the race we are running. Some of these legs have been extremely difficult – some have had to 'run the bend' or have a great deal of catching up to do.

The greatest encouragement an athlete can receive is from fellow athletes who have run similar races.

You may have heard of the very popular parkrun events or even taken part yourself. There are amazing volunteers who turn up each week to organise and run the events. parkrun is open to all and, although you are given a completion time, it is really all about running and finishing along with a group of like-minded and 'like-footed' people. At points in the race, there are people specifically appointed to call out encouragement and urge people to keep going. Then there are the 'tail walkers' (sometimes dressed as foxes, with suitably bushy tails), who encourage and help the stragglers, so that everyone can finish safely in the best time possible for them.

We might think of Jesus, who the writer to the Hebrews calls 'the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' as an excellent 'tail walker'. Not only that, but it is he who starts us off on the run, encourages us all along the way and is there to cheer us as we cross the finishing line.

The writer to the Hebrews points to people from the past who have had great faith to complete their race. Along with them and our fellow 'runners for today', we can run with perseverance the race that stretches ahead of us.