

**“ ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’
‘Let the dead bury the dead.’ ”**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, in 1924, Eric Liddell was England’s fastest 100-meter-runner. He was expected to win the Gold Medal in the Olympics that year in Paris. **BUT**, then came the bombshell. When the Olympic schedule came out, the 100-meter event was slated to be run on a Sunday. Eric’s strict interpretation of keeping the Lord’s Day **“holy”** did not permit him to run on Sundays. He was crestfallen, as you can imagine.

When word got around that Eric would not run the race, incredible pressure was put upon him. Even the Prince of Wales tried to get him to violate his conscience. When Eric absolutely refused, English newspapers called him a traitor. Regardless, Eric refused to violate his beliefs.

Eric met with the coaches and suggested that a teammate run in his place, i.e., in his 100-meter race and he would run in that team-mate’s race, the 400-meter race, even though he had never run in such a long race in his life.

To make a long story short, not only did Eric win the Gold in the 400-meter race, **BUT** his teammate won the Gold in the 100-meter race. So, instead of England winning only one anticipated Gold medal, she actually won two!

A few years after the Olympics, Eric surprised the world by going to China as a missionary. Later, the girl he loved, joined him. They married and had 3 lovely children.

Then came WW II. When Japan entered the war, Eric sent his wife and children to Canada. Shortly thereafter, Japan invaded China. Eric was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He continued his ministry in the camp.

A few years later, Eric Liddell died a heroic death in the camp.

After his death, his wife began receiving scores of letters, describing Eric’s heroism in the camp. In separate letters, two people told her that Eric was the only reason they didn’t commit suicide.

In 1980, someone got the idea to make a movie about Eric and the 1924 Olympics. When she heard about it, Eric’s wife, living in Toronto at the time, said:

“Who’d be interested in an event so long ago about a man who wouldn’t run on a Sunday, simply because of his Christian beliefs?”

As it turned out, millions of people were interested. The movie was made. It was called ‘Chariots of Fire.’ It not only broke all box-office records, but also won the 1982 Academy Award!

The story of Eric Liddell illustrates the positive side of Jesus’ teaching in today’s Gospel, which I/deacon just read to you from St. Luke. Jesus says:

“No one who sets hand to the plow & looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Eric Liddell never looked back. Once he decided to follow Jesus, he kept looking forward. He never looked back, even in the face of tremendous public pressure.

He never looked back, even in the face ...of being called a traitor!

**‘What was the secret behind Eric’s courage? What was the secret behind Eric’s loyalty to Jesus?’
you ask. Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

The secret lies in a remark Eric’s widow made in an interview with the Toronto Star. She said:

“Eric always spent the first –and very early –hour of every day in Bible reading, prayer, and planning his day.”

Here we have the secret behind Eric’s courage. Here we have the secret behind his loyalty to Jesus. **Eric Liddell was a man of prayer.** He was able to keep his hand to the plow and not look back, i.e., keep his perspective on life and his priorities straight, because ...he met Jesus every morning in quiet and private prayer.

Once upon a time, in 1982, an article appeared in Reader’s Digest about a Catholic, advertising executive. In spite of her successful career, she felt an ‘emptiness’ in her life.

One morning, during a meeting with her marketing consultant, she mentioned this ‘emptiness.’

“Do you want to fill it in?” her colleague asked her.

“Of course, I do,” she said.

He looked at her and replied, **“Then start each day with an hour of prayer.”**

She looked at him and said:

“Don, you’ve got to be kidding. If I tried that, I’d go off my rocker.”

Her friend smiled and said, **“That’s exactly what I said 20 years ago.”**

Then he said something else that really made her think. He said:

“You’re trying to fit God into your life. Instead, you should be trying to fit your life around God.”

The woman left the restaurant in turmoil. Begin each morning with prayer? Begin each morning with an hour of prayer? Absolutely out of the question!

Yet the next morning, the woman found herself doing exactly that. And she’s been doing it ...ever since! The woman is the first to admit that it has not always been easy. There have been mornings when she was filled with great peace and joy. **BUT**, there have been other mornings when she was filled with nothing ...but weariness. And, it was on those ‘weary mornings’ that she remembered something else that her marketing consultant had said:

“There will be times when your mind just won’t ‘go’ ...into God’s sanctuary. That’s when you spend your hour in God’s waiting room. Still, you’re there and God appreciates your struggle to stay there. What’s important ...is the commitment.”

The story of Eric Liddell and the advertising executive ...challenge each one within the sound of my voice. We can’t listen to stories like these and NOT feel the call of an inner voice to do SOME-thing similar in our lives ... if we are genuine about having a life in harmony with God.

If we are having trouble keeping our eyes focused on Jesus, if we are having trouble in keeping our hand to the plow and not looking back, if we are experiencing an ‘emptiness’ in our life, MAYBE, just MAYYY-BE ...we should consider making some ‘daily commitment’ to Jesus.

What should that commitment be? Only we can answer that question for ourselves. Most likely, we should do SOMEthing. And, as the marketing consultant said, what’s important ...is the commitment! Who knows, perhaps it could start with daily Mass.

I will now close with a familiar prayer:

“Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve: to give and not count the cost; to fight and not heed the wounds; to toil and not seek for rest; to labor and not ask for reward, except to know –that I am doing your will.”

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you ...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen