



Dear Friends,  
 Although I enjoy occasionally watching sports and athletic events, I wasn't able to watch much of the Olympics this year. I also missed the final event, the marathon, on the Sunday. But since I do watch television, I couldn't help but see the event replayed several times over the next few days. Italy's Stefano Baldini won the gold medal with a time of 2 hours, 10 minutes and 55 seconds. American, Meb Keflezighi crossed the finish line 34 seconds later and took the silver medal. Brazilian, Vanderlei Cordeiro de Lima, got the bronze medal with a time of 2 hours, 12 minutes and 11 seconds.

However, we will never know how the race would have ended had Vanderlei, who was leading the race at the time, not been tackled by Cornelius Horan, a defrocked Irish priest, about three miles from the finish in Sunday's race. Horan, was wearing a red kilt, knee-high green socks and a sign attached to his back stating: "The Grand Prix Priest; Israel Fulfilment of Prophecy Says the Bible" when he attacked Vanderlei Lima, knocking him into the crowd.

Vanderlei stated: "I was scared, because I didn't know whether he was armed with a knife, or something and whether he was going to kill me." "I don't blame the Olympic Committee. It would be impossible to have police watching everything. And having the public close to the race serves as an incentive to the athletes. I'm not going to cry forever about the incident, although it broke my concentration. If you stop in a marathon, you struggle the next three or four kilometres. It's hard to get your rhythm back. But I managed to finish and the bronze medal in such a difficult marathon is also a great achievement. My joy is greater than my anger."

I don't know of anyone, who expected Vanderlei to win a medal in Athens. That is, no one expected it except Vanderlei himself. His previous Olympic best was 41st place in Atlanta. (He won marathons in Tokyo in 1996, in São Paulo in 2002 and in Hamburg in 2004.) But, Vanderlei entered the marathon in Athens determined to bring home a medal for Brazil.

Vanderlei drew cheers from the crowd in the Olympic stadium and with a big smile on his face spread his arms like wings and weaved from side to side as he crossed the finish line. After the race, Vanderlei said in an interview: "I think the Olympic spirit prevailed and I prevailed. I was able to show that determination wins races."

What would you have done if you had been attacked and knocked down towards the end of marathon? Most of us can't begin to answer that question because we have never even started a marathon, much less finished one. Although I don't know Vanderlei personally, by what he said in the interviews, I believe that he was only able to come back and finish the race because of his resolve to win.

In Hebrews 12:1-3, the Bible says the following: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that lay ahead endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and sat down beside the throne of God. Consider the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.*

Jesus Christ, set an example for us when he overcame great obstacles and endured tremendous suffering by looking ahead to the joy God had promised. By looking to Jesus, you and I can do the same in our challenges.

I'm sure that life has already knocked you down several times and it will probably happen again. However, you can get back up again if you will remember everything that God has promised you. Don't let life's knockdowns and surprise attacks sidetrack you. Stay focused. Remember your purpose. Don't ever quit. Keep your eyes on Jesus and his glorious promises.

Could Vanderlei have won the gold had he not been knocked down? We'll never know. (Stefano Baldini and Meb Keflezighi were already gaining ground on Vanderlei before the incident.) But in my book, anyone who can get up and shake off adversity and still finish a race with poise and a smile on his face is a gold medal winner.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

Shalom – Salaam – Peace,

## COMMON GROUND

In this edition Stephen Taylor writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC