

Gold offered to those with hearts of gold

We've all been thrilled in recent days with Michael Phelps' pursuit of Olympic gold. We applaud his character and focus.

I've been thinking of some other people, though, who also deserve gold, but the world has never heard of them.

Phil told me that, when he was a little boy, he remembered watching the man down the street walking past his house each day to the bus stop on his way to work. Each evening he would walk past his house on the way home. In summers he would sometimes carry a watermelon for the family.

Phil learned what it was to be a man. To faithfully support your family, rain or shine, sleet or snow. To this anonymous neighbor, I offer gold. And to the little boy who was watching, and who has become a great man himself, to Phil I offer Olympic gold. (To his wife, Emily, I offer Olympic gold as well. It's not always easy living with someone from Mount Olympus!)

I've told the story of Susan before. Susan was the sweet cheerleader who dated the handsome high school baseball player. Shortly after they began dating, he began to develop a disease that grew brain tumors. Susan was advised by doctors to let him go. "He'll never be well. He'll never walk. You'll never have a normal life," one of them advised her.

Susan, of course, disagreed. "He will walk," she said. "He will walk down the aisle for our wedding." She was right.

But the disease progressed after marriage. She was, of course, advised to never have children. "You'll be a single parent," they said. Susan, of course, disagreed. "I want something of Craig to live on." They had a beautiful baby, who today is a wonderful young woman, who wants to be a neurosurgeon to treat people with brain tumors!

To Craig, who fought disease with such courage, I offer Olympic gold. To Susan, who lives life with such faith and purpose, I offer Olympic gold. To Chloe, their daughter, I offer Olympic gold for all that you are and all that you are becoming.

I think of Marie caring for her aging husband. As his mind fails and as his health fails, she has so faithfully cared for him. She has been there cleaning him up when he soils himself. She has been there calling 911 when he falls. She has been there through hospital stays and long convalescent periods. She is there daily with him in the nursing home. To her I give Olympic gold.

I cite these few people, not to embarrass them, which perhaps I have. (I tried not to by not mentioning any last names.) But I dared to offer them Olympic gold because their lives challenge any of the greatness of the ancient gods of Olympus. Their lives reflect the gold of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The Olympics come only every two years. They thrill us with the athleticism and dedication of the participants.

But greatness is everywhere to be found. We only need eyes to see. Don't focus on the young person committing the crime, but focus on the young person studying and going to school to make something of his or her life. Don't focus on the person having the affair, but focus on his or her effort to rebuild his or her life and relationships. Don't focus on the fall but on the recovery.

The secular gods of our culture appeal to the lowest common denominators of human behavior - lust, greed, avarice, pride and other selfish behaviors. But despite their glorification in the media and in entertainment, they are proven to be false gods by those who choose to follow the living God.

And in the end it is not I who can really offer gold to anyone. That is offered only by God. And it is affirmed so eloquently by St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, when he wrote: "Prove yourselves innocent and straightforward, children of God beyond reproach in the midst of a twisted and depraved generation - among whom you shine like the stars in the sky."