

# Courtesy, joy and the Kingdom of God

SPORT

## Fr Vlad Felzmann

The courteous 'Namaste' – 'I bow to you' – has stayed a familiar word among courteous people ever since, due to Covid restrictions, physical contact was frowned upon, and giving someone the elbow, or a knuckle to knuckle punch, seemed, though humorous, disrespectful and inappropriate.

Courtesy – with its synonyms, polite, well mannered, civil, respectful, deferential, well behaved, well bred, gentlemanly, chivalrous, gallant, ladylike, genteel, cultivated, gracious, obliging, kind, considerate, pleasant, cordial, genial and affable, showing politeness in attitude and behaviour towards others – shows humanity at its civilised best.

Ten years ago, in his 2014 World Cup video message to organisers, athletes and fans, Pope Francis employed Brazilian soccer slang to underscore what is necessary for soccer to cultivate a 'culture of encounter'. He said: "We must overcome individualism, selfishness, all forms of racism, of intolerance and of the instrumentalisation of the human person. It is not only in football that being *fominha* – a selfish player who keeps the ball and doesn't pass it, a ball hog – is an obstacle to positive results for the team. Because, in life, when we are fominhas, ignoring those who surround us, the entire society is damaged."

Although courtesy and respect are two words that often go together, they are not synonymous.

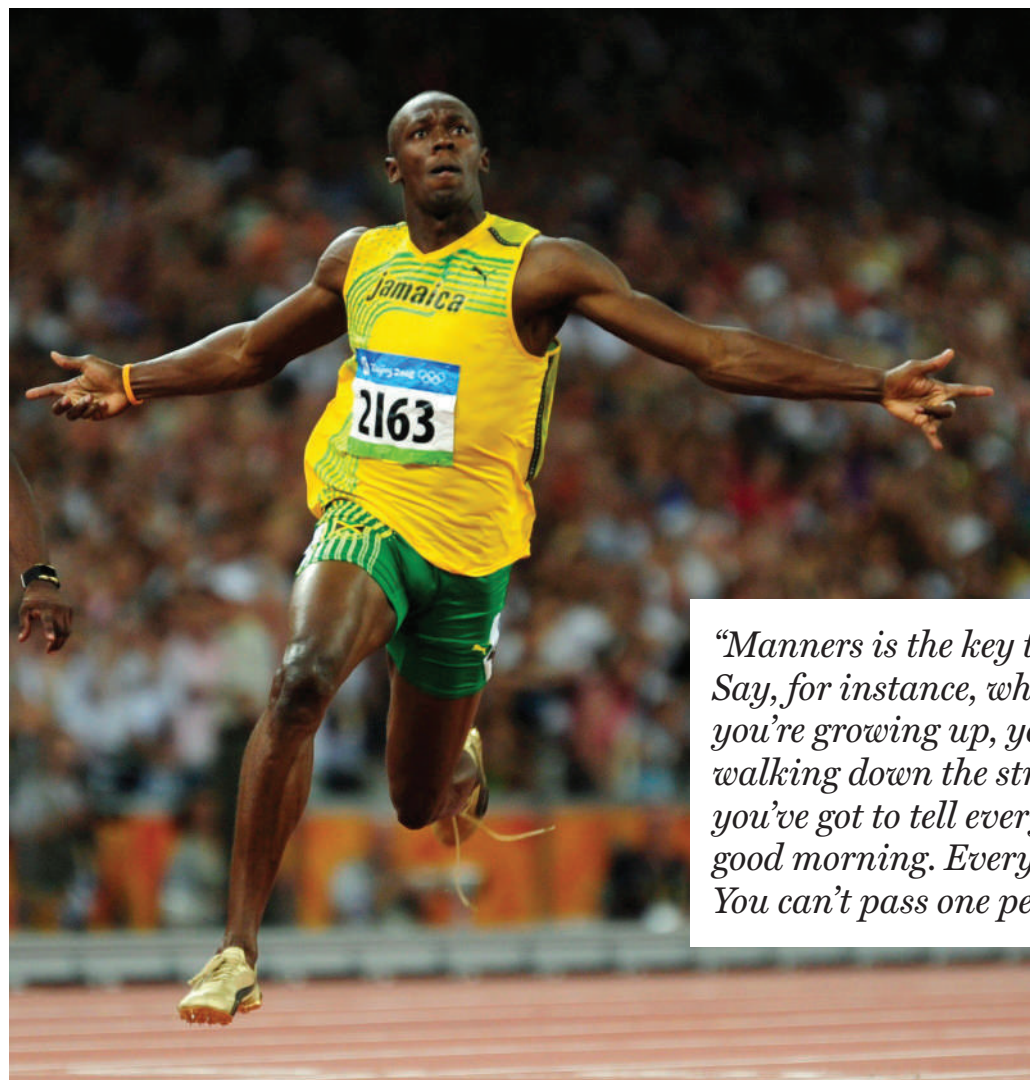
We all prefer individuals who are both respectful and courteous to others. From childhood itself, in decent families, children are taught to be courteous and respectful of others. But these two are different things. Courtesy is being polite to others. Respect, though expressed through courtesy, can be defined as admiration for someone because of their qualities or achievements.

Roger Federer, arguably the greatest tennis player of all time, once said "I fear no one but respect everyone."

### 'What you do to the least of mine, you do to me'

Personally, I try to be courteous even with people I do not respect. Staying on moral high ground is *ubuntu* – good for both in that relationship. It provides me with a stress-reducing foothold – and an entertaining view – on life.

Erastus Wiman (1834-1904), best known as a developer in the New York City borough of Staten Island, a founder of whiskey



*"Manners is the key thing. Say, for instance, when you're growing up, you're walking down the street, you've got to tell everybody good morning. Everybody. You can't pass one person."*

producer Canadian Club, and owner of the New York Mets baseball team, said: "Nothing is ever lost by courtesy. It is the cheapest of pleasures, costs nothing, and conveys much. It pleases him who gives and receives and thus like mercy, is twice blessed."

Remembering the words of Jesus Christ, "What you do to the least of mine, you do to me" (Mt. 25:40), I try to recognise God's presence in everyone and treat them accordingly. That's not always easy in an angry crowd on a narrow pavement or a tight-packed tube.

"Manners is the key thing. Say, for instance, when you're growing up, you're walking down the street, you've got to tell everybody good morning. Everybody. You can't pass one person." A point made by Usain Bolt – remember him? – a Jamaican former sprinter, widely considered to be the greatest sprinter of all time. He is still, ever since 2009, the world record holder in the 100 metres, 200 metres and 4 × 100 metres relay.

Mind you, that may have been fine in Jamaica but, as Crocodile Dundee found out, impossible in a city like New York or, as I have discovered, Oxford Street, London.

### Practice the courtesy of good sportsmanship

Tennis has its rules on etiquette that can be found in The United States Tennis Association (USTA)'s

'Friend at Court' under 'The Code'. The introduction states: "Tennis is a unique sport, one that is often played without supervision, referees or officials. As a tennis player, it is important that you know and follow the rules and practice the courtesy of good sportsmanship on court."

It also asks players to "please take time to view and print the USTA Pacific Northwest Sportsmanship and Discipline Rules, Regulations and Guidelines."

Golf also has a reputation for courtesy with its guidelines on etiquette before a game, including punctuality. During the game, players must stay silent and still while an opponent is at work, while after a game, "It's often traditional to stay and have a drink with the

guys you play with after the round. You can have a shower or not, but drinking will only occur after everyone's arrived."

Football – with its all too often racist experiences – is, alas, not in courtesy's Premier League.

On the whole, though not perfect, rugby is better. Teams tend to shake hands instead of a fist-wave after a game. Most teams show respect for the opposition, not celebrating tries as if a life has been saved, and then behave soberly at the end of the game. Having spent 80 minutes knocking seven lumps out of each other, both sides extend a hand straight away.

Straight after the final whistle, the Springboks go to shake hands with the referee and then the opposition. The All Blacks do the very same. The Japanese have a



great reputation for courtesy. As soon as a game has ended, they walk, line abreast, to face the stand, and then bow in unison.

### Reminding people of friends, neighbours and colleagues who enrich life

You learn a lot about the character of players during and at the end of the game. All this prancing, back clapping, whooping and self-congratulation is – to my ancient eye – pathetic. As soon as you hear the final whistle, why not shake hands with the ref, shake hands with the opposition, and if you have won, celebrate modestly?

Donald Bradman (1908-2001), ever with elaborate courtesy, replied personally to all his correspondents even into his 90s. Sir Donald George Bradman, AC, nicknamed 'The Don', was an Australian international cricketer, widely acknowledged as the greatest batsman of all time. Bradman's career Test batting average of 99.94 has been cited as the greatest achievement by any sportsman in any major sport.

"The only way to prove that you're a good sport is to lose. Baseball reveals character; golf exposes it," declared Ernest, 'Mr Cub/Mr Sunshine' Banks (1931 – 2015), an American professional baseball player who starred in Major League Baseball (MLB) from 1953 to 1971. He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977, and named to the Major League Baseball All-Century Team in 1999.

Rather than never making eye-contact – as so many do – when I walk along the pavement, I try to look into the face of a passerby and offer a smile, a raised eyebrow or even a bow of my head – and maybe, even a 'hello!'

Herbert 'Herb' Paul Brooks Jr. (1937-2003), an American ice hockey player and coach, reminded us that, "you're only as good as your values." His most notable achievement came in 1980 when, as head coach of the US Olympic hockey team at Lake Placid, they beat the USSR, the favourites, in the final.

Although the global picture is currently grim and depressing, I try to bring joy and fun into my neighborhood – and remind folk that they have friends, neighbours and colleagues that enrich their lives.

As Christians, we are charged with bringing the Kingdom of God into the world. A sure sign of that kingdom is courtesy.

**"I fear no one but I respect everyone," said tennis great Roger Federer**