

Homily for the University of Notre Dame Varsity Hockey Team

January 28, 2016

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My dear brothers in Christ, as many of you know, my favorite sport is ice hockey. Not only do I enjoy watching the game, I am also blessed to be able to still play the game, which I do frequently. It should therefore be no surprise that one of my favorite movies is a movie about ice hockey.

The movie is titled “Miracle,” and it is the story about the U.S. Olympic Hockey Team that won the gold medal at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. The miracle of that team was their victory over the highly favored and extremely talented team from the Soviet Union. Much of the movie focuses on all of the events leading up to that unforgettable game, from the tryouts to the many practices and the various dynamics that took place off the ice as the team roster was narrowed down to twenty men.

In the movie, Coach Herb Brooks emphasized the need to be well-conditioned and well-grounded in many of the fundamentals of the game, such as skating and passing. The players practiced several drills over and

over, so that they would be prepared to play at a peak level of performance.

In many ways, this is a good parallel to what happens for all of you in school. Take, for example, the many drills and exercises that you do for math or spelling. It can seem like a lot of work, and may even seem like busy work at times, but it is important to see these practices as a preparation for the future, so that you will be better equipped for future classes, and a future career. You are being given the tools to perform at a high level in whatever lies ahead for you, thus the importance of taking your studies and schoolwork seriously.

Going back to the movie, an important part of the preparation of the team is what took place off of the ice. These young men lived together for more than six months, sharing all of their time with one another, much of which was off the ice. During that time, a chemistry started to form to where they were able to work and act as a team, not just a group of individuals who happened to be talented hockey players.

At one point in the movie, the coach brought in a player who had not been with the team. This player was very talented and had the attitude

and skills that would help the team have a better shot at success. The players who had been together felt a little betrayed, and a few of them brought this to the attention of the coach. About to dismiss their objections, he asked them why he shouldn't be giving this new player a good look as a possibility for joining the team.

Immediately, one of the four players who had called the meeting said: "Because we're a family." They all agreed. Coach Brooks asked them, "And this is the family you want to go to Lake Placid with?— suggesting that he should not take this new player. They all agreed that this was what they wanted, so the coach decided to cut the new player and stick with the team he had.

This was a key point in the movie, because it showed that the team members saw one another as a family — something stronger than a team. These young men looked upon one another as brothers, which is one of the most meaningful and important of all relationships, and something that would be at the very heart of their success, bringing together and perfecting the technical skills with the chemistry of a bond that could not be broken.

Those of you who are on teams may have some appreciation for what these young men were feeling, how strong the bond can be on a team, even to the point of feeling like an extended family. But this experience of feeling a part of an extended family is not limited to sports, but is available to all of you in a very real way in our Catholic schools.

Let us ask the Lord to help us to live our mission to love one another in the family He has given to us – those in our homes, and those in our schools. May we not fear to be bold in stepping out of our comfort zone to share our love with our brothers and sisters, and to realize that in doing so, we are not losing anything, but gaining so much as we learn the most valuable skill that we could ever learn, for it is that virtue of love for God and love of our neighbor which will guide us in everything that we do in this life, and it is the one thing that will remain with us as we move toward eternal life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.