

One strange (if inconsequential) impact of Covid-19 are 'virtual' running races. We who have preregistered for, say, half-marathons, are now instructed that the race will be 5000 (or so) solo ones—take to the hills of your choice, pound 13.1 miles yourself, send in your time, and receive a gaudy medallion in a private ceremony of your own design.

Pretty lame for an \$80 investment—solos runs are what socially disinclined runners do all the time. After winter's gloom, Midwest racers want to inhale Spring with others: first, the corporate anxiety of sizing up your competition then boom, out of the blocks, alternately goaded and annoyed by the guy or girl next to us who seem to have the edge, mile after mile. Finally, the last half-mile or so when you draw from untapped sources and lunge to a strong finish.

I love it! It keeps me sharp and in shape, a little defiant of age, still 'enlarging the place of my tent, not holding back!' (Is. 54:2) or in St. Paul's words, 'I press on to take hold of that for which Jesus took hold of me' (Phil. 1:12). Running races compels me to reach for more. For the last decade of so, I have slowed only a little, and on occasion have surprised myself with better times.

But this 62-year-old mortal is feeling his limits. Last year I suffered a couple injuries while training with my junior partner in chaste crime-capers, Marco Casanova. New to competing, he ran through his limits and aced his first half-marathon in October. Since then, we've trained on long runs together, and, I say with feigned humility, he began to surpass me. Ouch. Experiencing him pace then disgrace me by jutting out til he ascended the hill and disappeared... well, I felt 62.

Why then did I ask Marco to do that blasted virtual run, my first? Cause I wanted the goad and I wanted to see God bless the guy as his gift accelerated and he celebrated the grace of running. As expected, we ran shoulder-to-shoulder for the first half, then Marco broke away. I strove to hold my own, and he found the groove right for him. In a flash I reckoned that others stronger and younger than me must share in this race and surpass me. How else will a generation be rescued from the stink of sexual sin? How else will She be made chaste, ready for Her soon-coming-King?

'Forgetting what is behind, straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal...' (Phil. 3:14)