

## MISSION MESSAGE

### One World, One Faith: What the World Cup Can Teach Us About Mission

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This summer, the eyes of the world are turned toward North America as the FIFA World Cup unfolds across the United States, Mexico, and Canada. I'll admit upfront that I'm not much of a soccer fan — I'm holding out for College Football and the World Series. And yet, even I can feel the buzz.

For a few weeks, billions of people from around the world will take a break from their normal routines to watch and cheer alongside strangers who, just hours before kickoff, may not have shared a single inch of common ground. I think there is something beautiful — and something deeply Catholic — about that.

Walk through any city hosting a match, and you will see flags from dozens of nations waving side by side. You will hear different languages shouted in unison at the same goal, the same save, the same missed penalty. Fans who cannot understand each other's words find themselves celebrating after a final whistle, united not by nationality but by something larger: a shared love of the game, a shared moment of joy... or heartbreak. This is shared humanity.

As with the Olympics, or any other global event, I can't help but be reminded of what the Church is called to be. The word "Catholic" itself means universal — not bound to one culture, one language, or one nation, but embracing all of them. Just as the World Cup gathers people from

Brazil and Senegal, Japan and Croatia, Mexico and Morocco onto the same field, the Church gathers believers from every corner of the earth into the same Body of Christ. Our missionaries serve in tiny village chapels in the Amazon, in bustling parishes in Manila, in remote outposts across the African Sahel — and every one of them is connected to us, and to each other, through the same faith we profess at Mass each Sunday.

The camaraderie we see on the soccer pitch with players from rival clubs who become teammates for their country, fans who become friends over a shared chant, mirrors the camaraderie the Gospel calls us to live every day. I've seen this firsthand on mission trips, more times than I can count. A group arrives in a new country, a little apprehensive, maybe homesick, not sure how to connect with people whose language and customs are unfamiliar. Then someone brings out a soccer ball. Within minutes, those same nervous strangers are laughing, shouting, and high-fiving each other on a dusty field or a small patch of grass. The game doesn't need to be translated. The camaraderie of sport speaks for itself, and it opens doors that conversation alone often can't.

We are not meant to remain strangers to one another. We are meant to recognize, in every person we meet, a brother or sister made in the image of God.

This *IS* the missionary mentality: not staying comfortable

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within our own borders, our own customs, our own familiar faces, but going out to encounter the whole human family. When you support the work of the Missions, your prayers and sacrifices cross oceans just as easily as a World Cup broadcast does, reaching catechists, sisters, and priests who are bringing Christ to people who have never heard His name.

So, as you watch the matches this summer and feel that surge of unexpected solidarity with people you've never met, let it remind you of something greater: that we are all, already, one family.



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