

11TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME, A

FROM THE WORLD CUP TO THE CUP OF SALVATION

1. VAR Lesson. Sisters and Brothers, it seems I am taking the ongoing FIFA World Cup a bit too seriously. Why? On Friday, 12th June 2026, the USMNT defeated Paraguay 4-1. One of the things that stood out for me was the use of VAR (Video Assistant Referee) to overturn a yellow card to US captain Timothy Ream. USA were leading 3-0 when Ream chased Paraguay winger Miguel Almiron. Almiron fell down and Ream was shown a yellow card for his challenge. However, replays showed there was no contact between the two players and that Almiron had dived, pretending to be hurt. “VAR check – mistaken identity” flashed up on giant screens around the SoFi Stadium and the game was paused. Then Dutch referee, Danny Makkelie, consulted his pitch side monitor, saw Almiron’s trick and therefore rescinded the yellow card shown to US Captain Tim Ream. He then issued a yellow card to Almiron for the false pretense. Sisters and Brothers, Pope Leo XIV’s prayer intention for June 2026 dedicated to the values of sports, captures the big lessons of the FIFA World Cup and of sports in general: “let us pray that sports be an instrument of peace, encounter, and dialogue among cultures and nations, and that they promote values such as respect, solidarity, and personal growth.” For me, that rescinded yellow card, finally given to the culprit, not only represents justice and fair play aided by technology, but is promoting my personal growth. It reminds how my conscience should function, how any well-formed conscience should function, namely, like a good referee and VAR combined, to show me my faults in the light of God’s revealed truth and love.
2. God’s Truth and Love. Hence, the FIFA World Cup is bringing me personal growth. How? It is giving me some metaphors for improved examination of conscience, for improved discernment of God’s will in the light of God’s infinite love reaching out to His creatures so as to share with us the joy of building a Heavenly Kingdom of justice, love and peace. You and I are free to say ‘Yes’, as Moses and the Israelites did in today’s 1st reading (Ex 19:2-6a); as the Blessed Virgin Mary did (Lk 1:38) leading to the birth of Christ our Saviour whose death and resurrection echoed in today’s 2nd reading (Romans 5:6-11) make it easier to say “Yes”. You and I are free to say “Yes” and go on a mission of charity as the 12 disciples did in today’s Gospel reading (Matthew 9:36 – 10:8). In fact, looking through the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we find no one who was called by God, just for his own sake alone. From Abraham, to Moses, to the 12 disciples all were chosen for the sake of those they will serve: Moses, for the sake of the Israelites. The Israelites: for the sake of every other nation on earth. That is the meaning of being a holy nation: “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.” (Ex 19:6). From them and

through the Holy Spirit, came the flesh of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Cup of Eternal Salvation for the whole world.

3. Cup of Salvation. And now, you and I, the entire Church, all the baptized, are further called and empowered by the Holy Spirit, for whose sake? For whose sake were chosen to be a Christian? Merely for your sake? I believe it is for our sake and for the sake of everyone on this planet who is troubled and abandoned, just like those our Lord looked upon with pity in today's Gospel reading. Yes, billions of people are still troubled and abandoned, confused, and traumatized: many traumatized by war, domestic violence, foreign or international violence, poverty, sickness, etc. And since Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8), He is saying to you and me now as He said then: "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so, ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Mt 9:38). Then He sent out His disciples as missionaries of charity, as a sports coach giving his team their official jerseys and stating the ultimate game plan: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons." And now, over to us, today. How can we discern God's call and how can we respond as Moses and the 12 disciples did? At least, our well-formed consciences, like a good referee and VAR combined, can assist us to see injustice around us. Yes, Scripture reading is to a good conscience, what VAR is to a good referee, challenging us to pray and work for justice, reconciliation and peace. And the grace to do that, is available to each of us at this Eucharist, where the cup of eternal salvation is raised, to the glory of God. Amen.

<https://youtu.be/g4HdH4F8w3o>

×We are grateful to Fr Andrew Ekpenyong of St Mary Magdalene Catholic Church Omaha, USA for accepting to be our online homilist this year, 2026