



(OSV News photo/Pawel Kopczynski, Reuters)

Looking Back: Olympians Took Their Faith to the Podium

Amid close competitions and victory celebrations at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, many athletes from around the world expressed closeness to their Christian faith and celebrated God's role in their victories.

Rebeca Andrade

Brazilian gymnast Rebeca Andrade, 25, won the gold medal in the women's floor final, earning her sixth medal in total.

In an interview with CazéTV, Andrade commented: "This medal was not because I asked God for a medal; He gave me the opportunity to win it..."

"He was always there blessing me, protecting me and feeling proud of me, knowing that His servant was always giving her best."

Rayssa Leal

Olympic skateboarding bronze medalist Rayssa Leal of Brazil



(OSV News photo/Angelika Warmuth, Reuters)

Rayssa Leal

celebrated and witnessed to her faith during the Victory Ceremony in Paris July 28. When the 16-year-old won the bronze for her country, she used sign language to quote John 14:6: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Katie Ledecky, Phoebe Bacon and Erin Gemmell

The three swimmers are alumnae of a Catholic all-girls school: Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland.

On Aug. 3, Ledecky, 27, became the most decorated American female gold medalist in any sport as well as one of only two women from any nation, in any sport, to win nine gold medals. She has 14 medals total.

Katie Ledecky is outspoken about how her Catholic faith guides her life. After the 2021 Tokyo games, she told the *Catholic Standard*,

newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington, that she prayed the Hail Mary before each race to calm her nerves, just as she had during the 2012 and 2016 Olympics.

Gemmell earned a silver medal in a 4x200-meter freestyle relay; and Bacon had a strong fourth-place finish, narrowly missing a bronze medal in the 200-meter backstroke by .04 seconds.

—By Maureen Boyle, OSV News.

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, a 25-year-old alumna of Union Catholic High School in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, secured her place on 2024's Team USA by shattering her own world record in the 400-meter hurdles at the Olympic trials June 30.

In her post-race interview with NBC Sports, she expressed disbelief at breaking her world record. She accredited her win to the power of God: "I was not expecting that, but He can do anything. Anything is possible in Christ."

She won the gold and set a new world record in the women's 400-meter hurdles final Aug. 8 (and won a gold in the women's 4x400-meter relay).

—By Jessica Miano, OSV News.

Nick Mead

Gold medalist rower Nick Mead joined swimmer Katie Ledecky as a flag bearer, leading Team USA at the



(OSV News photo/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters)

Katie Ledecky

Olympic closing ceremonies Aug. 11 in the Stade de France.

His parish church in New York City, Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, congratulated him on its Facebook page: "Congratulations to parishioner and newly minted gold medalist Nick Mead who, along with Katie Ledecky, has been selected by Team USA to lead America's Olympic team as a flag bearer at the closing ceremony on August 11th."



(OSV News photo/Tingshu Wang, Reuters)

Nick Mead

Mead's four-boat team won gold Aug. 1 by beating New Zealand by 0.85 seconds.

—By Maureen Boyle, OSV News.

Ryan Murphy

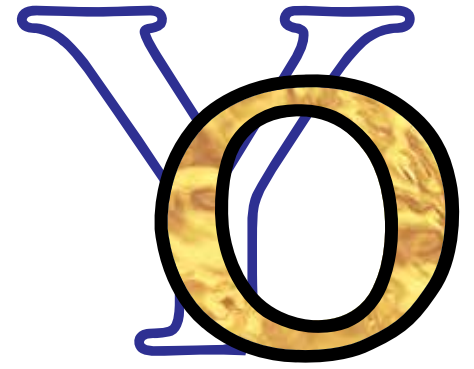
Ryan Murphy, a 29-year-old Catholic swimmer who grew up in Florida, took home a bronze medal in the men's 100-meter backstroke as well as a silver and gold in the men's and mixed 4x100-meter medley relay, respectively.

He garnered attention during the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro — where he won three gold medals — after genuflecting following a swim.

"I believe God has given me a great talent, for which I'm eternally grateful," he told the *National Catholic Register* at the time. "My faith gives me comfort despite the outcome of a race. I ultimately believe — I know — God has a larger plan for me."

Many more Olympians from around the world witnessed to their faith. Who inspired you? Tell us at Observer@Rockforddiocese.org

—Information provided by OSV News and *National Catholic Register*: <https://www.ncregister.com/cna/athletes-witness-to-their-faith-at-paris-olympics>



YOUNG OBSERVER

Youth Meet Jesus While Serving at Summer Camp

By KIMBERLEY HEATHERINGTON | OSV News

WINCHESTER, Va. (OSV News)—Summer is mission trip season. Often, Catholic teenagers and their chaperones practice the corporal works of mercy in developing nations while simultaneously expanding their cultural horizons. But what about the poverty and hardship — the kind that some groups often travel far to alleviate — right here, in our own country?

Catholic summer mission camps in the U.S., such as Arlington Diocese WorkCamp, Baltimore WorkCamp, and Catholic Heart Workcamps, are helping youth live out the corporal works of mercy by alleviating poverty and hardship in their communities.

These camps involve Catholic teens working alongside contractors and chaperones to improve living conditions for those in need, emphasizing the motto of making homes "safer, warmer, and drier."

The camps also integrate growth in participants' faith through worship, prayer, Eucharistic adoration, and confession.

At the Arlington (Virginia) Diocese WorkCamp, Kevin Bohli, executive director, encourages participants to reflect on why God called them to serve and what personal transformation they may experience while taking on various tasks, such as repairing decks and floors.



(OSV News photo/Jim Hale, Arlington Catholic Herald)

Contractor Jim Oswalt works with students at a homesite in Stephens City, Va., during the Arlington WorkCamp June 26, 2024.

The Baltimore WorkCamp (June 23-28) — managed by parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore — is, in a way, descended from the Arlington Diocese WorkCamp after volunteers from the archdiocese attended the Arlington camp some 14 years ago. Marissa Paoletti of the Baltimore WorkCamp said that while homes are transformed "our true goal is to transform hearts for Jesus."

Catholic Heart Workcamps, operating nationwide, similarly combine service with spiritual enrichment, inspiring participants to continue serving their communities beyond the camp experience as "the hands and feet of Christ." Father Sam Kachuba, a Catholic Heart Workcamp chaplain, said that by serving others, campers "have the chance to meet Jesus and offer back to Him their love."