News



The helmets of the Kansas City Chiefs and Philadelphia Eagles sit outside State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, site of Super Bowl LVII. The two teams will play for the NFL's Vince Lombardi Trophy on Feb. 12. (OSV News photo/Reuters/USA Today Sports/Kirby Lee)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Philadelphia — February 7, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Philadelphia Eagles fans are turning to prayer, preaching and the city's iconic soft pretzels to support their team in Super Bowl LVII.

On Feb. 12, the Birds will take on the Kansas City Chiefs at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, in their first return to the Super Bowl since their 2018 victory over the New England Patriots.

"They're motivated to win," said Sr. Martha Pooler, a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia and a native of South Philadelphia, home to the city's sports complex. She's a proud member of what she calls her "Philadelphia-founded" congregation, which was established by Bavarian immigrants in the 19th century to serve the city's most destitute.

Once the Eagles clinched the NFC Championship on Jan. 29, Pooler and her fellow women religious mobilized, even outfitting a statue of their patron saint with an Eagles jersey, cap and game-day blanket.

"Sr. Angela Presenza dressed St. Francis as soon as the Eagles won [that game]," Florence Smith, the order's communications director, told OSV News. "I walked in on Monday morning, and he was already like that. I thought, 'That was fast.' "

The sisters also revamped a prayer for the Eagles composed by Sr. Ann Marie Slavin for the team's victorious 2017 season: a text based on the famous "Prayer of St. Francis" that reads in part, "Lord, make our Eagles instruments of your strength. Where there is great victory, let us be humbly proud. ... Where there are Chiefs passes, let us make brilliant interceptions. ... Where there is sadness, Lord, wipe tears from the eyes of our losing Chiefs brothers and their fans." The prayer closes with a rendition of the Birds' fight song, "Fly Eagles Fly."

Smith said the sisters will gather Feb. 12 at their motherhouse in Aston, Pennsylvania, for prayer and a pep rally featuring "wings, Philly pretzels and water ice" — all favorite snacks in the City of Brotherly Love.

Advertisement

On Feb. 4, parishioners at Resurrection of Our Lord Parish in Northeast Philadelphia celebrated what pastor Fr. James DeGrassa dubbed an "Eagles-themed" Mass, with the congregation singing the hymn "Fly Like a Bird" by Ken Canedo for the entrance procession.

"I can't believe that on this date five years ago ... we won the Super Bowl," he said in his homily at the vigil liturgy for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time. "We had this Mass five years ago, and obviously, it worked."

DeGrassa noted the Eagles' successful season had sparked "electricity in the air," creating "a bond of being Philadelphians."

At the same time, he said, "we don't need a Super Bowl to be kind to one another and to affect one another in a positive way."

Reflecting on the day's Gospel (Matthew 5:13-16), in which Jesus tells his followers they are "the salt of the earth," DeGrassa said believers, like salt, are meant to "draw the best out of other people."

That's a lesson Mike Campellone, chair of the theology department at Father Judge High School in Northeast Philadelphia, has been imparting to his students in his newly created course "Spirituality and Sports."

"In sports, yes, there is a winner and a loser, but ultimately, sports are designed to bring out the best in each individual, as a teammate or an opponent," he told OSV News.

Regardless of the final score, God is on the gridiron, said Fr. Thomas Barcellona, pastor of Our Lady of the Angels Parish in Cape May Court House, New Jersey, and a Catholic chaplain to the Eagles for the past 19 years.

"To tell you the truth, we're all missionary disciples in our different ways," he told OSV News. "When you have a career in sports, that may be a little different ... but it's the same point of going forth in a sense of a call through our baptism. Players, coaches — each one of them is a minister, and in that sense, we're called to spread the good news of Jesus Christ."

Read this next: Sisters of Charity give new meaning to what makes a faithful Chiefs fan