



"Katalambano"

Katalambano means to take eagerly; to seize. It can even picture seizing with hostile intent.... In short, it's competitive.

I'm about to write something that I realize will make many of you gasp in horror, but here goes: *I'm competitive. And I like it.*

In fact, one of my pet peeves is how the word "competitive" somehow got a bad rap. No longer does it encapsulate the valiant notion of striving above and beyond one's capacity, but it's used as an insult, disparaging the unladylike behavior of trying really hard. "She's just competitive" is an explanation for the undignified pursuit of excellence.

In an attempt to satisfy my competitive yearnings, I have run in the *Danskin* triathlon series for the last four years. My goal is always to beat my time from the previous year. So on race day, I track down the girl who finished a few minutes ahead of me last year. I look her in the eye and say, "I'm coming after you."

This year I was after Nichole from Long Beach, whose time was three minutes faster than mine. She laughed when I told her I was chasing her and said she was chasing a spot in the top three. I told her to look for me there.

We leapfrogged several times throughout the race and finished within 37 seconds of each other. She waited for me at the finish line (the only indicator I'll give of who won). We hugged each other and laughingly mourned our mutual bike catastrophes. We had each suffered a chain derailment which cost us precious minutes, but left us with a great photo-op of four blood-stained, greasy hands. We were now not only competitors but also friends. Competition moved me toward my goal—not against my competitor.

The apostle Paul is my role-model competitor. He uses a Greek word in his letters that has become one of my favorites—*Katalambano*. It means to take eagerly; to seize. It's about obtaining a prize through eager, strenuous exertion. It can even picture seizing with hostile intent; to apprehend. In short, it's competitive.

Paul writes, "I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold [*katalambano*] of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on to-

ward the goal to win the prize..." (Philippians 3:13-14).

I often wonder what he saw as the "prize" to take hold of. Some people think he means the prize of eternal life; some think he is striving to attain the full maturity of Christ. But I wonder if maybe he is talking about the prize of fully fathoming the greatness of God's love. I wonder this because he uses the same word, *katalambano*, when he prays for all the saints to have the power "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep" God's love is (Ephesians 3:18).

He wants them to seize it, because there is something about fully comprehending the love of God that changes you forever. And that transformation is worth *katalambano*.

Last April, my five-year-old son ran his first foot race. He didn't come close to winning, but he sure did *katalambano*. The look of determination on his face down the home stretch was something I had never seen on him before. He was fierce. And I loved it.

As we were driving home, I asked him what had made him so fierce while he was running. What had he been thinking about? With a longing in his deep brown eyes and a catch in his throat he said, "Oh, Mommy, I so wanted to break that big yellow ribbon."

Jesus is my big yellow ribbon. And if I don't keep my eyes fiercely focused on him, if I glance sideways for even the briefest of seconds, I will end up racing for all the wrong things—money, beauty, fame—things that don't move me toward Jesus' love, but move me against my neighbor. And that's not good competition.

I know I will never fully *katalambano* the extent of God's love, but I will race for that yellow ribbon until I draw my last breath. Because his love changes everything about me. It gives me passion. It gives me courage. It gives me victory. It is the Olympic Gold I wear over my heart every day.

So, go ahead. Be competitive. And love it. □

—Susan Reedy