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Finishing Well

Creating Partnerships to Encourage Men to Finish Well in Life

REFLECTIONS ON *Faith*

Barry Morrow

“MEN LUST,
BUT THEY
KNOW NOT
WHAT FOR;
THEY WANDER,
AND LOSE
TRACK OF THE
GOAL;
THEY FIGHT
AND COMPETE,
BUT THEY
FORGET THE
PRIZE;
THEY SPREAD
SEED, BUT
SPURN THE
SEASONS OF
GROWTH;
THEY CHASE
POWER AND
GLORY, BUT
MISS THE
MEANING OF
LIFE.”
-GEORGE
GILDER

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

We really didn't believe it was Jesus Christ, not at first. True, the Cincinnati Reds said they'd just signed Him to a one-day contract, but who would believe that? We just figured Marge Schott had snuck back into the office and was hitting the vodka a little hard. But then a rusty 1976 Chrysler pulled into a pay lot a few blocks from the stadium, and we saw a man giving off a glow as he walked. He was mobbed, first by tens, then by hundreds, until, of course, he absentmindedly walked right across the Ohio River. He wore blue jeans, a Columbine athletics T-shirt and a WWGD? wristband. "What Would God Do?" asked a woman in the mob. "Nah," Christ said with a laugh. "What Would Griffey Do? My Dad and I are huge Junior fans."

He was with His "agent," 11-year-old Little Leaguer Yolanda Johnson of Detroit, who said Christ was in pretty good shape for 1,999 years old and had a "wicked" knuckler. Somebody asked Him why he picked now to come back. "I wanted to earlier," He said, "but the Reds had that facial hair thing. The front office said Christ didn't want much to sign, just the league minimum, which he took all at once, in cash, and handed to Hildy Kranmitz, a bag lady outside the stadium. "Oh, and a bunch of balls, bats and gloves for the kid," a Reds source said. "Didn't even want 'em signed."

"Why baseball?" we asked Christ. "I keep hearing people say sports is the new religion," He said. "Thought I better check out the competition." With that, He went into the Cincinnati clubhouse to meet His new teammates, many of whom wept uncontrollably. Teammates raced madly ahead of Him, throwing away porn magazines and entire cases of chewing tobacco, and scrambling to get unopened fan mail out of trash bins.

After that, Christ took his seat in the Reds' bullpen, wearing 32 for Sandy Koufax. He chewed sunflower seeds, told updated Casey Stengel stories and recounted some of the lost 25 years of his life. "I kicked around minor league slingshot for a few years," He said, "but I was no David." At one point, just for levity, Christ picked up the bullpen phone and said, "Anybody feel like Chinese?"

In the ninth, with Cincinnati holding a 5-2 lead over the Cleveland Indians, Reds manager Jack McKeon turned to Christ, who arrived at the mound to a deafening roar, as the organist played a jittery "Jesus Is Just Alright."

The Righthander was wild at first, his third pitch plunking Indians star Roberto Alomar in the ribs. Christ sprinted to the plate to check on him, initially alarming Alomar, who admitted afterward that he thought it was the beginning of a fight. The Messiah gave up a long home run to the next batter, Manny Ramirez, and, curiously, was waiting at first base to shake his hand. "I had to," Christ said. "Manny nearly hit that thing to Galilee."

After that, He settled down, getting two ground ball outs before striking out Jim Thome to end the inning. Actually, He struck out Thome on the pitch before but overruled home plate umpire Eric Gregg, saying the called strike was "a good inch" off the white. "It's not Eric's fault," Christ said. "He doesn't know it, but his right eye is down to 20-100."

After the game there was an enormous press conference, carried by every major network in the world and broadcast to more than two billion people. Somebody asked Him why He simply didn't strike out every batter He faced. "Rust, mostly," He said.

Did He have any advice for today's ballplayer? "Well, yeah," Christ said. "If there's anything I hate, it's seeing guys with solid-gold, diamond-studded crucifixes around their necks. Do you have any idea how much vaccine that money would buy? And don't make the sign of the cross at the plate with your right hand and then charge the mound and throw punches with your left. I mean, make up your mind. And please stop praying for wins. Put yourself in my position. If your kids were playing each other, who would you root for?"

He answered a few more, until young Ms. Johnson said they had to get to Los Angeles to have a looong talk with NRA president Charlton Heston. "Let me just say one last thing," He said. "I know you people are nuts about athletes, but try not to go overboard. Why worship the gift when you can worship the Giver?"

With that, there was a blinding light and both of them were gone. The line on Christ: one inning, two runs, both earned, and one save.

-Rick Reilly, *Sports Illustrated*, July 1999

“TO LIVE IN
THE PAST
AND FUTURE
IS EASY. TO
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PRESENT IS
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A NEEDLE”
-WALKER
PERCY

“A school without football is in danger of deteriorating into a medieval study hall.”

–Vince Lombardi

“On Thanksgiving Day all over America, families sit down to dinner at the same moment – halftime.” –Anonymous

“When I played pro football I never set out to hurt anybody deliberately, unless it was, you know, important, like a league game or something.” –Dick Butkus

Peter McNaughton had remarked that nowhere does a man go so naked as he does before a discerning eye all dressed for golf. Shivas recalled the remark and asked me if I knew the word *hamartia*. “It originally meant bein’ off the taraget, in archery or some such,” he said, “and then it came to mean bein’ off the taraget in general in all yer life – it got to mean a flaw in the character. . . when a man swings he tells us all about himself. . . .” “Yes, a man’s style o’ play and his swing certainly reflect the state of his soul,” he resumed his description of golfing hamartiology, “Ye take the one who always underclub. The man who wants to think he’s stronger than he is. D’ ye ken anybody like that?” He raised one quizzical eyebrow. “Think about the rest of his habits. Is he always short o’ the hole?” –Michael Murphy, *Golf in the Kingdom*

“In contrast to the unwieldy world which we hold in common, baseball offers a kingdom built to human scale. Its problems and questions are exactly our size. Here we come when we feel a need for a rooted point of reference... Baseball isn’t necessarily an escape from reality, though it can be; it’s merely one of our refuges within the real where we try to create a sense of order on our own terms. Born to an age where horror has become commonplace, where tragedy has, by its monotonous repetition, become a parody of sorrow, we need to fence off a few parks where humans try to be fair, where skill has some hope of reward, where absurdity has a harder time than usual getting a ticket.” –Thomas Boswell, *Why Time Begins On Opening Day*

SCRIPTURE FOR REFLECTION...

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not with aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

--Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 24-27.

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