

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

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Probably the most exciting sporting event I've ever experienced was Game 7 of the 1991 World Series, which the Minnesota Twins won by a score of 1-0 in 10 innings. It wasn't just the game that was so great, it was the seats. Some parishioners at my church had invited me as their guest, and we were in about the 10th row on the third base line in the Metrodome. It felt like I'd hit the jackpot. Then two other things happened. First, the Archbishop (John Roach) arrived in the section as the guest of others, and they all went right past me to sit in the first row. Dang! Then after the game was over, I went home and my sister called me. She was then living in Denver and had watched the game on TV. She said, "I can't be certain, but I could swear I saw our parents seated in the front row behind home plate every time the camera zoomed in on the batter. So I investigated and discovered that indeed it was they, as the guests of very wealthy movers and shakers in town. Dang again! I thought that I had gotten the prize that evening, but I'd been out-done by my boss and my parents, and who knows who else. All of which leads me to this question: As whose guest and in what seat would Jesus be seated at the Super Bowl?

I think the answer is pretty clear: Nobody and nowhere. Jesus would likely not be anywhere near U.S. Bank Stadium this weekend, and for one simple reason: His friends and followers were not the kinds of people who would have access to any of that event. In fact, as you have likely heard, the sorts of people whom Jesus chose to hang around with have been cleared away from the security zone around the stadium: The homeless, the mentally ill, the addicted, those who sleep in church basements at night. All gone, so that the party may carry on. We don't need to hold the wealthy and the celebrities in disdain—in fact, Jesus wouldn't do that, either. But is important to point out that those were generally not the people he chose to seek out or call as his followers in his ministry in Galilee, because it was harder for them.

For the past two weeks we heard of him summoning common fishermen to be his closest friends. And in today's gospel we hear again that he chose to spend his time with people who were tormented by demons, whether psychological, or physical, or spiritual. These are not the people you'll see in front of the cameras at the Super Bowl. Jesus, however, will be with them. Just as he was with Peter's mother-in-law in today's gospel, and as he was with all those sick and diseased and possessed people who surrounded the house in Capernaum, and with all those nameless, desperate nobodies in Galilee who awaited a savior who wanted to come to them.

It's not a sin to be rich and glamorous. But it most certainly is a sin to be rich and glamorous and not to care about those who are something else. Jesus taught us that. And on a weekend in which rich and glamorous is literally center stage, we Christians are the ones who have the responsibility to remember and to proclaim that, as we always do.

In this gospel, when Simon Peter tells Jesus that "Everyone is looking for you," that was only kind of true. That "everyone" included those who were sick and sorrowing and debilitated and aware that they were trapped in situations of suffering from which they could not free themselves. Yes, *they* were looking for him.

But the healthy, and wealthy, and powerful and glamorous? There's not much indication that they were looking for Jesus, either here or anywhere else in the bible. On those rare occasions that Jesus is confronted by the high and mighty in the Sacred Scripture it is because of one of two things:

- They either want to destroy him because of his good works, or
- They want favors from him to heal or serve someone in distress, whom they love.

Jesus was correct to point out elsewhere that the healthy do not seek a physician; sick people do. He came to be with *them*. He came to be with *us*. He did not come to be at Super Bowl XII. Not that he *can't* be. It's just that not many will be seeking him there. That ought to tell us something, and remind us of those for whom Jesus' message is particularly concerned. We are commissioned to be with *them*, as He was, at sickbeds, in hospitals and prisons, in rooms where loneliness and despair threaten to take over and where no TV cameras are there to cast bright lights on anything.

It's just the gospel, as it has ever been, but as we may need an extra reminder on this weekend when so many other things claim to be more important: They are not.

Let us busy ourselves about all those invisible, unglamorous things that actually matter.