

Apostles message for Thursday, March 26, 2020.

Today was to be Opening Day. (Sigh.) The start of the baseball season has always been associated with feelings of hope and renewal. These feelings are partly the result of baseball's place in the calendar. It starts back up again when nature sheds its drab winter palette and begins taking on all the colors of Spring. Sportswriter Charley Honey once wrote, "Spring offers that most gracious of God's gifts: play. Baseball gives us permission to go out and play."

I'm sure the feelings associated with the start of the baseball season also come from its proximity to Easter, the central and defining event in the Christian calendar when we understand and celebrate spiritual rebirth and our hope of eternal life through faith in the resurrection of our Savior. But I think there's something about baseball itself that contributes to our sense of renewal and hope this time of year.

Baseball is a game of hundreds of tiny movements – the way the pitcher grips the ball, the lead the runner takes off first base, the shading of an outfielder in anticipation of where the ball will be hit – played at a pace that allows us to watch how everything unfolds. Baseball is also a game where the improbable and barely explainable happens. A star pitcher loses his "good stuff." A weak hitting 2nd baseman delivers a game winning hit in the bottom of the ninth. Baseball is a game where anything can and does happen, so even fans of very bad teams (I am one of these) are hopeful this time of year.

Baseball is a game of statistics, but the box scores are different today. Instead of keeping track of runs, hits, and runs batted in we are following numbers of cases, hospitalization rates, and deaths. We try to remain hopeful, but we feel like fans of a team on a bad losing streak. We're told that we are at war with an invisible enemy, and sometimes that makes us feel like a rookie swinging at a 100-mph fastball. We're specifically warned to not go out and play, as if we really felt like playing anyway.

Baseball has given us some terrific movies. My favorite is still Field of Dreams. The defining moment for me is when Terrence Mann, the character played by the incomparable James Earl Jones, is trying to convince Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner to "build it, and they will come." "It's money they have and peace they lack," says Terrence. That line resonated with audiences in 1989 when the film was released, but it seems even more true today. It's peace we lack, and peace we need.

Peace begins with a contrite heart, a feeling of sorrow for failing to be the people God made us to be. We confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness. We may also need to ask forgiveness from family, friends, or neighbors we have injured. The next step is the hardest for some people. Extend the forgiveness you've asked of God to others. Let go of the grievances you've been collecting. Stop keeping score. Peace in the biblical

sense meant, "I have no grievance with you, and I ask that you have none with me. Let there be no disputes between us." This is the embodiment of Matthew 5:24, "Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." In the vacuum created by the departure of sorrow and grievance, a profound sense of gratitude rushes in. It is in this spirit of thankfulness that we offer our gifts and approach the Lord's table.

I've found it helpful to consider this peace process as a mindful meditative prayer. Find a calm, quiet place and close your eyes. Sit quietly and acknowledge the places in your life that need peace. When you're ready, begin. Breathe in: "Dear Lord." Feel God's presence in the life-giving air entering your lungs. Breathe out: "I'm sorry." Give your sins to God. Breathe in: "Forgive me." Know that your Faithful God has forgiven you as you feel the air return to your lungs. Breathe out: "Peace." Let go of your grievances and extend forgiveness to others. Breathe in: "Gratitude. Thank you, Lord."

Lord Jesus, we pray for peace in our lives and peace in our time. We are so grateful for your healing presence, and we look forward to the time we can return to your table, the time we can go outside and play, and even for the next time we can hear the crack of the bat and the roar of the crowd. We remain faithful and hopeful as we await the next season of our lives. Amen.

Peace be with you, dear friends.

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