

Homily for October 31, 2019

A popular movie from 1992 was an entertaining film based on the female major-league baseball teams of the 1940's, *A League of Their Own*. In one of the most powerful scenes in the movie, the star catcher of the Rockford Peaches, played by Geena Davis, threatens to quit. She's tired; she's worn out; she's worried about her husband who has gone to war; and in a low moment, she is ready to "throw in the towel." This star catcher, by far the best player in the league, complains that the game is just "too hard." The manager of the Rockford Peaches, played by Tom Hanks, tries to talk her out of quitting.

When she says, "It's too hard," he replies, "Well, baseball's supposed to be hard. . . If it weren't hard, everybody would do it." And then he says this: "Hard is what makes it great!" The same thing could be said about the Christian life: "Hard is what makes it great!"

The Church in Rome, to whom Paul was writing the letter we have been reading for the past two weeks, understood how hard it was to live as a Christian in Nero's Rome. Although written around 57-58 AD we can imagine how the words of Paul would have supported the Christians in Rome in AD 64, the year of the Roman fire that destroyed much of the densely populated city. To divert attention from rumors that he had started the fire for his own amusement and to make room for his grandiose building program, Nero claimed that the Christians were to blame. Thus Nero was the first emperor to launch an official persecution of Roman believers. The Roman historian Tacitus who was born around 56 AD wrote years later of Nero's barbarity.

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all the Christians who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.¹

So severe was the punishment that even Tacitus, who hated the Christians, calling them criminals and those who hated mankind, was able to recognize Nero's megalomania. With Tacitus' words in mind listen again to these words of Paul:

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<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0078%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D44>

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²

Paul wants his readers and us to know that nothing in the created realm can exclude us from God’s loves shown to us in Jesus, The world may exclude us even to wanting to kill us, might find our teaching and way life threatening and unacceptable to the world’s values, but this needn’t dissuade us from staying with the game. For although Christianity is hard it is indeed good because the one who is our saviour experienced humiliation and disgrace at the hands of the very one’s he called out to in today’s Gospel.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!³

Nothing can separate us from his love when we choose to come to him like chicks to their mom.

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#). (1993). (Ro 8:35–39). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Lk 13:34). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.