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The Super Bowl LVI Experience at the Los Angeles Convention Center is seen Feb. 9, 2022. (CNS photo/Kirby Lee, USA TODAY Sports via Reuters)



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Besides sharing Sunday and the preponderance of unexplainable mysteries involved in both, my Detroit Lions fandom bears no connection to my Catholic faith.

That's not true though, is it? Everything is connected to my Catholicism. Our church is in the world and our faith never withdraws. Christ's message permeates all things, which, coincidentally, includes football.

As the Super Bowl comes to SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, a historically Black and working-class area of Los Angeles, world media descends upon southern California to capture football's high holy day. I'm excited to watch this game for many reasons, but some things stand in the way.

A cleanup effort in the surrounding region just weeks before the Super Bowl stirred up controversy as crews displaced dozens of homeless people living nearby.

Local government denied that clearing the encampment was related to the event, while activists highlighted the issue representing another installment in what they view as a continuing saga of problems with the stadium's construction in Inglewood.

As I drove around the stadium area last week, I could not believe how immaculate the public walking spaces looked for blocks, and I found myself wondering where this sort of funding for public cleaning has been. Then I remembered the human beings who have no place to pitch their tents and are not given the support and resources to relocate by a city government curbing the places where homeless people can camp while also creating new housing that lower-income people can't afford.

Some believe the stadium will create an economic boon for Inglewood, creating additional funding and jobs for a community that has historically struggled economically. Local minority-owned businesses stand to enjoy larger traffic around events at SoFi Stadium. However, those working-class small businesses could also be displaced by corporate interests. Consumers will have a hand in guiding that fate.

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It keeps going. The city of Los Angeles and the Rams are also coordinating with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, an organization with a terrible human rights record, to combat bootleg merchandise surrounding the game, which has translated to the intimidation and removal of street vendors. Many took to Twitter to complain about the high Latino population being intimidated by their presence in the Inglewood community.

I want to just enjoy the game, but I find it hard to. My responsibility to my faith compels me to do more.

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Activism overlapping with sports presents an annoying dilemma that many wish to live without: considering the moral implications of our escape. It makes perfect sense why anyone would want to simply enjoy watching their team. Looking away is too tempting, especially when you don't have answers. We already deal with so much all the time.

Yet moral complexity does not excuse inaction. Retreating from confronting onerous decisions constitutes as much a choice as intentionally accepting the decision to do nothing. The penitential act in Mass contains language emphasizing an acknowledgment of sinfulness both in what we do and what we *fail to do*.

No one expects the Rams to solve homelessness in Los Angeles, but a Catholic fan can see this news and feel a call to participate in assistance, to make known to the Rams that they must do more. You can do the same for your team, wherever you live.

An unequivocal answer won't come. It can't. Catholic faith rarely deals in absolutes.



Los Angeles Rams fans at a tailgate party in the SoFi Stadium parking lot in Inglewood, California, celebrate the team's victory over the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC Championship game Jan. 30, 2022, amid the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Bing Guan)

I have long found the idea of simply quitting any attention to football as a frustrating lack of commitment to any growth. Withdrawing from football fandom is tantamount to doing nothing. A Catholic dedication to shifting football culture through your voice to whatever team you support contributes to a culture of positive change.

If you want to continue to watch and enjoy the Super Bowl, as I admit I do, then the way to honor my Catholic ethos must translate into concrete action like making my voice heard and donating money to local housing justice causes or giving my time to volunteer. This also means financially supporting local, minority-owned businesses so they aren't pushed out by wealthier companies. It means calling your city council member and sharing your concerns about affordable housing nearby. Find a way to be of service.

No compassionate person campaigns against the joy of others. Many members of my community are excited to again have a football team in Southern California. An outstanding LA Times article in September covered an on-field protest against the Dodgers that interrupted a game. The article discusses how fandom allows for important, moral criticism and enjoyment of that team.

Looking to the NFL brings more than a few items for potential outrage. Potential racial prejudice in hiring practices, chronic traumatic encephalopathy or brain injuries, and the list can go on and on. The issues specifically surrounding just the stadium in Los Angeles are a small piece of the pie.

The faithful have much to fight for in this game. Hold me accountable, please. We will do this together. Building a world of compassion requires participation.