

Solidarity and the Red Sox

Ken Briggs | Sep. 30, 2011 NCR Today

I grew up close to Boston and started listening to Red Sox games on our cabinet sized radio when I was about 4. Short form: I'm a lifer.

But my contrary streak prevents me from joining that confectionary commercial known as "Red Sox Nation" which came into existence around the time the cursed tribe won the World Series in 2004 for the first time in eight decades.

It's a vehicle for selling stuff and for make-believe "belonging," comprised, near as I can tell, by the throngs who cling to winners.

I suspect the "nation" has lost half of its fair weather fans since the Sox missed the playoffs in woeful fashion a couple days ago. The squad's drastic tumble in September undermined a pretty good rest of the year.

It was big news as sportswriters and pundits piled on the Fellows of Fenway sarcastically and scornfully. To a degree the Sox had it coming. They had positioned themselves atop the big spenders, outspent only by the vile Yankees, so they were prime targets of those, including myself, who deplore the gulf between big money team contenders and small market losers. It's class warfare on another scale.

Unlike many of those who gloat over the team's failure, I don't hold anything against them. In fact, though I dislike most attempts to shoehorn religion into areas foreign to it, I see an element of Catholic social teaching here.

The key assumption is that we are created as social beings, subject to the myriad influences that stem from our interaction, and that we are products of those inter-connections, therefore responsible for each other's basic welfare.

Teams act that way. Though baseball often seems to be a loose confederation of individuals piling up personal statistics, it is ultimately a laboratory of solidarity, where each is born from the whole and the whole is more than its parts.

Which is to say that I'm not angry at the Red Sox because things happen to social units that are often beyond their understanding. I'll venture to say that no Sock wanted this to happen or plotted the team's demise. Teams get hot and the go flat, usually in rough unison. Why a group of top-notch hitters collectively goes into a slump is beyond me. Something gets transmitted among them that saps them of whatever it takes to win or invigorates them beyond their normal capacities.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is the stuff of mystery -- and a demonstration of our God-given mutuality. Yes, Papelborn should have finished the inning of relief without a scar. Crawford should have caught that sinking liner. But they didn't. THEY didn't.

I don't think will power had anything to do with it. But something did and that's where I start to get religious.

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