

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Hamlet (1.5.167-8)

Baseball is back – Spring Training underway. They've been calling it The National Game since the 1860's. But what is a "game"? It seems something different from ordinary everyday life where you get up in the morning and go to work – at a desk or behind a wheel or cleaning house. Ordinarily we work by the clock in a somewhat isolated way – doing what we are paid or expected to do. We get one thing done and then turn to another – endlessly. Life is like a straight line from here to there as years add up . . . and it's wake up time again tomorrow. A game is different. Different atmosphere. We *play* games – we don't work at it; we enjoy what we are doing – and we do it with expectancy to win or lose and then recycle it over again for the pleasure of the experience of doing nothing demanding - but fun! And we get emotional. We behave un-routinely, we jump or shout or pound somebody on the back. We are energized.

And that's true even if you are not actually playing the game but watching it. Watching it? That's too passive a word. We watch it from the edge of our seats, we stretch forward almost wanting to be on the field, to identify with the fellow chasing a crucial fly ball or sliding into second. We are up one minute and then comes a strike out and we're in the dumps, maybe uttering a profanity. We stand and cheer when the ball goes over the wall. I remember how energized, hopeful, worried, delighted I was during those three World Series contests of the Giants – I "loved" Marco Scutaro catching the final out of game 7 of the 2012 NCLS series, then looking up into the rain, arms outstretched, mouth open (drinking it in).

In other words, we *participate* in a game in a way we don't quite *participate* in our everyday routines or "work". And one reason why we don't participate or shout or cheer or leap from our seats in our everyday activities is because we have to have reasons for doing things – *wonder whether we are doing things right or wrong, correctly or incorrectly* . . . whereas errors during a game are simply part of the game . . . they contribute to the moans or cheers, to the chanciness of the to and fro.

Take the famous routine of now long gone Abbott and Costello. Abbott invites Costello to a Yankees game. Costello wants to know who's playing for the Yankees. Abbott says, *Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know is on third*. Costello responds: *Well then who's on first?* Abbott says, *Yes*. Costello asks again, *Well then who's on first?* Abbott says, *Yes*. Costello, a bit stressed, says, *I'm asking YOU who's on first*. Abbott replies, *That's the man's name*. Costello: *That's who's name?* Abbott, *Yes*. . . . until we get to *I don't know* on third . . . Baseball, the game, totally disrupted. Costello's interrogatives answered by Abbott's affirmation of Costello's interrogatives! Costello bewildered to the point of frantic. A world of *who* and *what* and *I don't know* taking the life out of a game!

Theologians view our liturgy, even our liturgical season of Lent as a kind of game – or let's say a ritual or script into which even we in the pews are supposed to be drawn – to participate, *to get into the drama* going on so that it carries us to new heights or depths of being, makes of us more exuberant, ranging from the grief of Good Friday to the joy of Easter. We may even learn to view life itself as a game, a ritual where everyday we hit a single or double or home run or strike out. It's all part of life as a game to be played out – grief phasing into joy in a spiraling way forever and ever – cycle after cycle.

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