

“HITTING IT OUT OF THE PARK”: MAKING A PITCH FOR ALMSGIVING

Watching the video made me cringe. Teachers from the nation’s third largest public school district (355,156 students in 642 schools) produced a creative dance video to explain why they were against returning to in-person education. It both went viral as well as sent the city’s mayor into a rare break with the powerful union, as she **passionately begged** them to get back into the classroom. In years to come, books will be written, papers delivered at academic conferences— all centered upon the high cost of **not returning** to in-person education during the pandemic. By contrast, the **Wall St. Journal** published an op-ed by Bill McGurn highlighting the **Catholic school system** and its response to the pandemic. Initially, the pandemic’s economic toll in part caused 107 schools to close in 2020, but when the delay of opening the public schools became widely known, enrollments **rebounded**. (+ 5.5% here in the Archdiocese!)

In his piece, the author noted, “in 1997 then-Sen. Biden did declare on the floor that the plight of children ‘presently caught in a failed public school’ was leading him to **rethink his opposition** to vouchers. Perhaps now, with so many public-school systems leaving their students in the lurch, would be a good moment for another reconsideration.” While not holding my breath on that count, it illustrates that the Catholic schools are “**hitting it out of the park**” this year, while also keeping kids **safe and healthy**. They have made accommodations— detailed and expensive ones— to ensure compliance with CDC guidelines, yet haven’t missed a beat in providing quality, faith-based education. For Catholic school teachers, it is a **passion**. While able to command higher salaries elsewhere, they remain committed to passing along the faith.

I have been praying— a lot in fact— about my **Lenten almsgiving**. I keep these commitments private, but not this year, and all because of some little **pieces of cardboard**, measuring 3.5 x 2.5 in. that I keep in a box. You see, shortly after the great **Hank Aaron** died at age 86 on January 22, an idea popped into my head— “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” (Mt. 19:21) Aaron was a legend and a boyhood hero. While **Jackie Robinson** broke the color barrier with his debut in 1947 (the 75th anniversary is next spring), Aaron was arguably the game’s biggest star. Both men **suffered** on account of their **skin color**. Here’s one letter Aaron received in 1973: “You are not going to break his record established by the great Babe Ruth if I can help it. Whites are far more superior than [*slur*]...my gun is watching your every black move.” How pathetic—imagine dealing with this!

Growing up in **Mobile, Alabama**, Aaron’s life story was steeped in **racial segregation**. He had to be assigned a bodyguard as he neared Ruth’s record. I watched that game on **April 8, 1974**, marveling that I was witnessing sports history. The season had just begun— he had ended 1973 with 713 HR. He belted a 4th inning pitch off of Dodger’s pitcher Al Downing (who is infamous for his role!) Aaron was the last player from the old “Negro” League to also compete in the majors. He still holds the record as the all-time leader with **2,297** Runs Batted In (**RBI**). In my book, he still holds the record for **home runs at 755**. I refuse to recognize Barry Bonds record. **Robinson and Aaron**— giants of the game and civil rights icons, not by choice, but by necessity. Aaron’s death caused me to dig out my early 1970’s baseball card collection, mostly dormant, though I added a few key cards as an adult. Still, Jesus’ words in Mt. 19:21 resonate in my heart.

After prayer and seeing how card values have increased, I am **liquidating my card collection** and **donating 100% of the auction proceeds** to the **Aim Higher Foundation**. (visit their [website here](#)) AHF is providing \$1000 scholarships to nearly 2000 students in the Archdiocese this year! The value of my collection is largely due to two purchases of Robinson and Aaron **rookie cards**, always more valuable. The Aaron Card (1954 Topps #128) is professionally graded (scale of 1 to 10) as Excellent (PSA 5); the Robinson (Leaf 1948) as Very Good (PSA 4), making them **desirable cards** for collectors— and investors! I am hoping there may be individuals who would appreciate owning the cards, knowing that their purchase is making a difference in families being able to attend Catholic grade schools. Maybe they will even bid up the items a little over the market value! Aim Higher has done a great job



in helping families **bridge the gap** to enroll in these schools. I encourage you to visit their website to learn more. I will also auction these rookie cards: **Harmon Killebrew** (1955-PSA 5), **Tony Oliva** (1963-PSA 6), **Rod Carew** (1967-PSA 6) and Steelers QB **Terry Bradshaw** (PSA 7). Shhh, the 1971 Bradshaw was likely my brother's!

Lent begins this Wednesday. **Almsgiving** is a constitutive element of the season. This is a leap of faith. Humanly speaking, it will be **bittersweet** to part with childhood memories. Yet if more children can forge **new memories** and be formed as faithful Catholics— then, it's really **not much** of a **sacrifice** at all. If any of you have **vintage** baseball cards tucked away, might you **consider joining me?** I'd love to add a few cards, especially **rookie cards in excellent condition**. This auction will be linked from the AHF website. If anyone has an extra **Topps 1952 Mickey Mantle** (i.e. the most celebrated rookie card in the modern era!), I'll gladly add it to the list! All joking aside, if you desire to **support** the cause, simply e-mail me at frubel@cathedralsaintpaul.org or Aim Higher President Jean Houghton at jhoughton@aimhigherfoundation.org and we can discuss options. Let us remember, there is great **joy in giving**, and you can't take it with you!

- The response to our invitation to prepare for a Consecration to St. Joseph was heartening. We have **additional books** available this weekend. Recall, it is a **33-day period** of preparation (15 mins per day) beginning **Monday February 15**, in which the 300-page Fr. Calloway book guides you step by step. It will culminate on March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph. Thanks for saying Yes!
- Cathedral parishioners have generously supported the **Catholic Services Appeal**. The CSA supports vital outreach beyond our parish. On Commitment Weekend, know of my gratitude!
- After twenty years at the helm, Supreme Knight Carl Anderson of the **Knights of Columbus** is retiring. Replacing him will be **Patrick Kelly**, who boasts both a military and diplomatic background. The fraternal organization was founded by Bl. Michael McGivney and has contributed so much to the Church.
- Ash Wednesday Mass Schedule: **7:00 a.m.** | **12:00 Noon** | **5:15 p.m.** (with schola); a deacon led Prayer Service with the distribution of ashes completes the day at **7:00 p.m.** Each Friday during Lent, **Stations of the Cross** will be offered at **5:30 p.m.** (note time change). Participants will remain in place as clergy leads the stations. Organ and cantor will accompany the stations musically.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



Going, going...GONE! Hitting a Home Run for Schools!
Fr. Ubel is pictured in his office holding his most treasured baseball cards. All these cards will be auctioned next month to benefit the Aim Higher Foundation, an organization that provides \$1000 tuition scholarships to children who attend Archdiocesan Catholic Grade Schools.