

## “BRIDGING” THE GAP: CARDS AND THE “BIG GAME”

For many years, I have scheduled myself for the 5:00 p.m. Mass on the day of the “The Big Game.” Why? In small part, if a brother priest is a fan, it is much better for him to be freed up to enjoy it. Less altruistically, I have never been a huge football fan. Never played— would have gotten **injured** almost assuredly the first time I took a hit! However, since today is the day of the “The Big game,” I am devoting a column to it. That’s right— to Bridge! In my humble opinion, the **game of Bridge** is the “Superb Owl” of card games. (Hey, I don’t want to be sued for trademark infringement J) Why? I think it is because it is a game for those who love **to think**, strategize— and yes, perhaps even outsmart their opponents. I enjoy its complexity and am confident I’m unlikely to **tear my ACL** playing it! Every hand is unique— it never gets dull.

For the mathematically curious, the odds against being dealt all **four aces** in your hand are 378 to 1, and to receive **all thirteen** cards in one suit (the perfect hand!)— that is just 169,066,441 to 1. But there’s still **a chance!** A 2019 study from the University of Stirling, Scotland revealed that playing bridge keeps people smarter, happier and more social into old age. In the interest of full disclosure, the study was conducted by **Dr. Samantha Punch**, herself an expert Bridge player. To those who claim this makes the study biased, it is fair to raise that objection, but facts are also facts! She helps with a website called BAMSAs (**Bridge: A MindSport For All**). Click [here](#) to visit their website and see the research. First and foremost, Bridge has connected me in a new and deeper way with family. All my siblings play, as also my nieces and nephews. My mother patiently waited 58 years for her youngest to **finally learn** the game. Better late than never!

Bridge traces its origin to the 17th-century English card game of **Whist**; the similarities are clear. However, the game as we know it (Contract Bridge) is a century old. It requires solid **communication** based upon incomplete information. It utilizes memory, visualization and calculating risk and probability all at once. It requires **trusting** relationships (with one’s playing partner), **discipline** and strategy— and yes, a little luck never hurts! The process of bidding a hand (called the “auction”) is just about as important as how you play the hand once you begin laying the cards on the table (or click the mouse on your computer!). Despite all that, it is a great game to teach kids, especially our “tweens,” say ages 10-12. True, it’s not easy to hold thirteen cards in your hands, and elementary students might struggle with that. Still, kids **can learn** how to count a hand and make **logical inferences** based upon the knowledge they have gained.

While Cribbage is surely easier for kids to learn (not to mention the patience Bridge requires), it is not beyond their capacity. Look how easily kids manage **computer** technology— it is scary! Why not exercise their **brain power**? In fact, researchers have found a **link** between Bridge and improved **critical thinking** skills leading to test scores in children. See [here](#) to learn more. I sympathize with parents who worry that their kids are “vegging out” before a video game screen. Hollywood movies these days? Forget it! It is imperative to encourage wholesome entertainment that also develops important skills. My childhood **Monopoly** playing days were valuable in more ways than merely killing time on a rainy summer afternoon. Most importantly, Bridge fosters the truly authentic **human interaction** so needed today, both in families and in society.

Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) noted: “But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning ‘male and female he created them’ (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can

neither live nor develop his potential.” (GS, #12, 7 Dec. 1965) The **human dimension** of our interpersonal relationships is critical. Children benefit from meaningful **interactions with adults**. Certain activities foster such socialization. Our Catechism (CCC # 1882) states: “This ‘*socialization*’ also expresses the natural tendency for human beings to associate with one another for the sake of attaining objectives that exceed individual capacities. It develops the **qualities** of the person, especially the sense of **initiative and responsibility**, and helps guarantee his rights.” Initiative and responsibility begin early in life, at home.

Many **competing voices** vie for our attention and no cookie-cutter mold provides an answer for how best to filter these voices. If you tune into the game today— by all means enjoy it! It is certainly part and parcel of Americana since **Jan. 15, 1967**. Though this “garden party skunk” still thinks the NFL season should end in mid-January, I acknowledge that there are **many reasons** (most with \$\$) why it does not. But enjoy the fellowship, fraternity and incredible food. After I finish the Sunday 5:00 p.m. Mass, I’ll spend time with family, pining for another **2-Club opener** (22+ points!). It takes all types— that’s what I love about human nature. Enjoy your Sunday, regardless of what you decide to do after Church!



The coveted 2-Club Opener!

- The **Winter Olympic Games** are in being overshadowed by the geo-political landscape of China and its human rights violations. The government’s decision to afford 20-year-old cross-country skier **Dinigeer Yilamujiang** the honor of being a **final Olympic torchbearer** sent waves through the world. An olive branch? More likely, just clever propaganda. He is a **Uyghur**, a Turkic ethnic group of Chinese Muslims who have been subject to re-education camps.
- The annual **Peter’s Pence** collection supports the Pope’s worldwide charitable and operational efforts. Revelations that the Vatican invested some of those funds in real estate speculation has caused many Catholics to recoil. While investing charitable funds is nothing new and aims at increasing the funds available for distribution, it is a **risky** proposition. The Vatican **lost \$130 million** in the London real estate fiasco. It’s an incredibly tangled web that may take years to unwind, but a **15% decline** in donations, on top of an 18% decline in 2020 shows that people are voting with their pocketbooks.
- I am looking forward to engaging our young adults this Wednesday evening for the return of “Grill the Priest” segment of **Theology on Tap**. All 18 to 35-year-olds are welcome to join us at Flaherty’s Bowl in Arden Hills: 6:30 p.m. Social | 7:30 p.m. “Q & A” with yours truly.
- The 2022 **Catholic Services Appeal** is coming next week. By the time you read this, registered households should have received a CSAF mailing. I heartily encourage your prayerful support.
- The **January** heat and electric bill for the entire campus hit **\$30,000**. Yikes— I’m speechless!
- You saw it here first. My Super Bowl LVI prediction (Roman style!): Cincinnati Bengals **XXXI**- Los Angeles Rams **XXIV**!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector