

OF HEROES, SAINTS AND THE HALL: HONORING THE BEST AMONG US

It's been a hot week! If we ever complained about the summer heat, my father gently reminded us kids that it was nothing compared to what **he** experienced in 1936. Air conditioning then? You kidding me? The heat wave that blanketed much of the country produced **13 state records** that are still on the books. So, people were not exactly paying attention to a bucolic village on the shore of Otsego Lake in upstate New York. But there in Cooperstown, the U. S. Baseball Hall of Fame elected its first members: **Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson and Walter Johnson**. Their goal was to construct a museum to honor these and future members. Incidentally, Ruth had just retired the previous June. (The five-year waiting period only began in 1954.) They achieved their goal in the summer of 1939, marking the centennial of the legendary "first" baseball game that was held in Cooperstown and devised by General **Abner Doubleday** (†1893), a Civil War hero.

In 1937, newly elected **Cy Young** (how was he left off the first slate?), donated the ball from his **500th win** (1908) and his 1911 Boston uniform. Soon, other players followed, and the Hall contains a memorabilia collection second to none. MLB Commissioner Judge Kenesaw Landis decreed that no games would be played on **June 12, 1939**, the day the new Hall opened. At its inauguration, **20,000** fans showed up, swelling the population of the village six-fold. *Time Magazine* opined: "The world will little note nor long remember what (Doubleday) did at Gettysburg, but it can never forget what he did at Cooperstown." The U.S. Postal Service issued a commemorative 3¢ stamp to mark the occasion. Like so many initiatives, the Hall's founders could not envision how it might progress. But it did, and the Hall expanded in 1950. Today, five buildings comprise the complex and **3,000 visit** each day during the summer.

Beginning **five years after** their retirement, players are eligible for the next **ten years** to be voted into the Hall. The votes come from members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. For a player to be inducted, his name needs to appear on **75%** of the ballots. Red Sox slugger David Ortiz was the sole player voted from the BBWAA this year. After the 10-year period, a player may still be inducted, but via the Era Committee system— as with **today's induction** of Twins' greats **Jim Kaat** and **Tony Oliva**. According to the by-laws, "voting shall be based upon the player's record, playing ability, **integrity**, sportsmanship, **character**, and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played." (my emphasis added). Thus, it is **not** merely about statistics. Some truly amazing players have been **kept out** of the Hall to date: Pete Rose (gambling) and Barry Bonds (steroids) come to mind, albeit for different reasons. So, what is the purpose of such a Hall? Short answer— we all need **heroes**.

There are similarities between the HOF and the Church's own canonization process. In the Church, "saint" specifically refers to someone who has led a life of "heroic virtue." The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints also has a **five-year waiting period** after death before a "cause" may begin. Prior to 1983, it had been **50 years!** Popes can even **waive** the five-year rule, as did Pope John Paul II for Mother Teresa or as Benedict XVI did for John Paul II, just a month after the pontiff's death. The dicastery stipulates that a **majority** of theologians on a commission must "vote" to **recommend** the designation of heroic virtue. The Church names saints because they serve as **models of virtue** worthy of our emulation, reminding us that our **true goal** is heaven. They're my **heroes**, just as were my favorite childhood Twins. Some saints "speak" to us, while the temperament or extreme asceticism of others may present their own relational challenges. The good news is that there's a saint for everyone!

The "**character**" criterion is partly why a player such as **Gil Hodges** will be inducted today. His widow Joan (age 95) is unable to attend—his son Gil Jr., will represent the family. He had a stellar 18-year career at 1B and OF with the **Brooklyn** (later L.A.) **Dodgers**, playing his final two seasons with the NY Mets. The seven-time All-Star hit 370 HR and sported a career BA of .273. He also managed the 1969 World Series Champion Miracle Mets! By some measures, **not quite** HOF numbers. But the **devoutly Catholic** Hodges displayed **exemplary character** on the diamond. When **Jackie Robinson** shattered the color barrier in 1947, his teammate Hodges visibly supported him. If you can spare 30 minutes to learn about his life, watch "[The Gil Hodges Story | Soul of Champion](#)". Sadly, Hodges died suddenly of a heart attack on Easter Sunday in 1972 at the age of just 47. Robinson spoke at his funeral, just six months before his

own death.

Cooperstown is **immaculately** maintained today, never looking the slightest bit dated or tired. Sometimes, people let their guard down and rest on past laurels. Not this hallowed place! The staff members are also fans, and it shows! I visited once— a 50th birthday present. I am due for another visit, perhaps for my 60th in a little more than a year. In a world of **broken** promises and omnipresent **narcissism**, we need heroes who exhibit that “fame” is **never** about themselves. Life is about using one’s God-given gifts and talents for the **benefit** of others. Combining **talent and humility** in the world of sports is rare, and thus even more valued. Jackie Robinson’s grave monument in Brooklyn’s Cyprus Hills Cemetery is inscribed with one of his own quotations: “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.” Well said, Jackie!

- **Jim Kaat** pitched an entire generation, from 1959-1983. That’s 25 seasons (15 with the Twins) in all! He amassed 283 wins, with a 3.45 ERA. He won a gold glove 16 times, second only to Greg Maddux! **Tony Oliva** played 15 seasons, with a **career BA of .304**. Only **14 players** are hitting above .304 this season, led by the Twins **Luis Arráez**. That’s just 14 out of **780** active players. (N.B. in the AL, 13 pitchers per team do not hit). Congratulations Tony and Jim!
- Check out the **initial images** of the **James Webb** space **telescope**, taken from **1 million miles away!** It calls to mind Psalm 8: “When I see the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, the son of man that you care for him?”
- Animal Rescue, Part 2? Today’s lesson? Rescuing a **sparrow** that flew into the Cathedral is much trickier than a **fox** who fell into a window well! The sparrow chirped throughout daily Mass, once **almost** being snagged by an extended net. We set a trap, played chirping music from an iPhone— name it, we tried. Rest assured, it received a decent burial!
- Pope Francis named **three women** (two religious, one lay) to join the Dicastery for Bishops, the Vatican office responsible for recommending candidates for the episcopate. I **applaud** this because having a broad representation of the Church is critical in making these appointments. I am also convinced that more frequent canvassing of **local laity** would surface the most suitable candidates in any diocese.
- Twins CF **Byron Buxton** crushed a 427-foot game winning home run in the MLB All-Star Game. The AL won its 9th straight game, 3-2.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,

Rector



2022 Hall of Fame Inductees

From Fr. Ubel’s collection:

Upper Row L to R:

1970 Topps Gil Hodges (Manager), 1971 Topps Jim Kaat

Bottom Row L to R:

1970 Topps Tony Oliva, autographed baseball,
Puerto Rico Series 2018