

Fake Fan Noise

Watching our favorite sports teams play their games without spectators in the stands is a strange experience. Even though the game remains the same, and the athleticism can be extraordinary, the absence of real, cheering fans is a real diminishment from the experience of watching. That this is true is evidenced by the apparent need to pipe into the stadiums and arenas recorded fan noise. And, if I am not mistaken, the noise is even modulated to correspond to big plays such as touchdowns and clutch 3 pointers. But, take that fake noise away and you are left with a relatively small group of guys playing, what could be, a pick-up game in the park, albeit with fancy uniforms.

Our games often seem more important to us than our faith. There are many more “flying Elvis” Patriot’s logos on view than there are crosses out there in Patriot Nation. Being a fan seems to be about more than enjoyment of a game and the skill of players: It seems to fulfill people’s need to identify with something, belong to something and, maybe, to be part of some small victory now and then. Maybe it could be called “vicarious victory” when, in response to a big win by the Patriots, a person will not say “*they won,*” but, rather, “*we won!*” And, when your team is such a big winner as, for example, the Patriots have been, you have the benefit of “bragging rights,” as if you had really contributed something on the field.

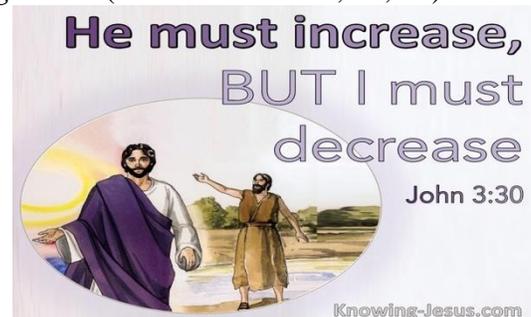
As long as it all remains in the realm of “all in good fun,” there’s nothing wrong with being a fan. But, it seems, in some people, fandom can become a bit too serious of a matter; taking on a cult-like sort of aura. This over-identification of one’s self with the team can take on such absurd proportions that if you were to insult a man’s team it would be taken to be as bad as spitting on the grave of his mother!

I see a version of this in everyday life in, what I would call, “***the righteousness of being on the right team!***” I see it with respect to nationality, politics, issues, products, ideology and in many other places. Those of us who are “car guys” are familiar with the Ford guys vs. the Chevy guys, (though this is rather old now); they over-identify with their brand. And then, there is the exaggeration of the significance of one’s nationality which can be taken to heights of silliness as if being

Portuguese or French or Irish were, somehow, a whole higher order of being human.

This phenomenon is worse when one assumes a posture of righteousness for being on the “right side” of an issue. The “righteousness” of which I write here is to take whatever “right issue” it may be and to form a club out of it with which to beat people over the head. Or, rather, it becomes a large neon sign with a flashing arrow pointing down at one’s self “**Righteous! Righteous! Righteous!**” One can easily find examples of this in “culture warriors,” “political warriors,” and, yes, “ecclesiastical warriors.” In fact, in this historical moment, there seems to be a whole “warrior class” out there! And, in fact, whatever the issue, they may be quite right or correct, but it’s all self-serving and self-referential: *Look at me! The righteous warrior!*

I think we need to be suspicious of those who are cultivating “fan clubs.” I repeat the same scripture I have cited many times before in this column wherein St. Paul challenges the factional Corinthians: “*Whenever someone says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely human? . . . No one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ . . . So let no one boast about human beings. . .*” (1 Corinthians 3:4, 11, 21)



St. Paul repeatedly warns communities and individuals about “boasting.” And, while we might understand this term, in a narrow way, as constantly calling attention to one’s attributes or accomplishments, it can take the form of the “righteous warrior” where, what appears to be a call to see the truth is really self-referential. And this flies in the face of, not only, St. Paul’s warnings but also the examples of John the Baptist (I must decrease), and the Blessed Mother, (My soul magnifies the Lord.)