

Pete Rose: Forgive Us as We Forgive Others

Not that long ago, a friend was promoting the idea of getting Pete Rose into the Baseball Hall of Fame. While I doubt few could deny that the talent and achievements this man has and did *should* have gotten him into the Hall of Fame, this drama has an angle that goes beyond mere statistics. He was a known gambler and it was shown that his debts led to him manipulate outcomes of games when he continued his career as a coach.

My reaction, however, is not completely limited to the facts surrounding this man's career. My dad knew him in college and, shall we say, was very put off by Pete's arrogance and selfishness even as a college player. My dad's intense dislike of the man was passed on to me and my siblings. So I do have some emotional baggage involved when discussing this issue.

My initial response to my friend's idea was to state that if I had my way, I would remove Pete's name from all official records! Then I gave my rational reasons why Pete should never be inducted into the Hall of Fame. But this conversation still echoes in my mind and recently I was dwelling on how one can get to Heaven. Personally, I believe George MacDonald was right when he said: Not for any or all of his sins that are past shall a man be condemned; not for the worst of them needs he dread remaining unforgiven. The sin he dwells in, the sin he will not come out of, is the sole ruin of a man. (*Hope of the Gospel* Chapter 1 "Salvation from Sin") While I am not aware of any Christian Church that would put it that way officially, neither do I see where this is in conflict with the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran or any other Church that has a mature doctrine of salvation. Actually, except for Calvinism, the only Christians I see where this would be in conflict with would be those who promote "Faith Only" in the Minimalist sense.

But regardless of the legitimacy of my belief, it made me question my response to my friend concerning Pete Rose. Certainly, what Pete did was wrong and it was wrong in a very serious way. Yet all of us likewise do things very wrong. If we do not impact as many people as Pete Rose did, it's only because we have less social power than he did, not because he is inherently worse than we are. And God does not care about our social power. But he does care if we forgive others: and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (Matthew 6:12). Am I damning myself through my attitude about Pete's nomination to the Hall of Fame?

Through God's Grace to all mankind, Pete has a Human Dignity that is no greater or lesser than mine. This dignity means that he is worthy of respect for the good he does and any authority he can exercise. Anything he accomplished on the playing field was done through gifts God gave him and we, as Christians, should appreciate these wonders as God's gift to us. And, in the case of Pete Rose, these wonders were so remarkable that they were on par with only the handful of others that deserves to be celebrated in a special way.

But this same Human Dignity also points out how flawed we are. It is this flawed behavior where forgiveness needs to come in. The Greeks had four loves: *Philia* (brotherly love or friendship), *Storge* (affection, as in for family or a pet) and *Eros* (passion). All three loves, however, can only exist if the object of love has some quality that is lovable. This is why God's love is one of *Agape*, or *Charity*, as it means to love the unlovable. We are not born with *Charity*, as it is a Theological Virtue. It must ultimately come from God. We can learn *of* *Charity* as God works through others (normally parents, teachers and role models) but we can only *accept* *Charity* into our lives by forgiving others.

But does accepting Charity mean Pete should go into the Hall of Fame? Well, let's build up to this point. Certainly, we need to forgive the man for what he did. My father must eventually let the anger he feels go away and I must eventually realize that my dad's anger is not my anger. In this respect, I believe forgiveness means I need to accept the accomplishments Pete made and not wish them removed from official records. Pete did them only by the gifts God gave him and I should not deny others the opportunity to see or enjoy God's works.

But all people have Human Dignity, not just Mr. Rose. And all Christians are called to protect this dignity. This means Christians are called to protect the impressionable and vulnerable (such as children). While respect of Mr. Rose's dignity should safeguard the baseball history he made, the dignity of those who find inspiration through baseball should likewise be safeguarded. They should not be given the impression that letting personal vices impact one's career is okay if you are otherwise good enough. Our children must know that baseball (as well as any other form of entertainment) is good but that there are values that transcend (or rise above) the sport.

The directors of the Baseball Hall of Fame were right in denying Pete Rose entry. Not because Pete Rose doesn't deserve forgiveness, but because the next generation of players needs to know that what he did is not tolerable. Contrast this to Michael Vick, who was allowed to continue playing professional football after being convicted in engaging in dog fights. We also have virtually every "A-List" performer who sings the National Anthem at professional sports butcher the song for their own personal glory. And lest we forget, Colin Kaepernick who started the disrespectful practice of kneeling during said anthem that is growing in professional sports. This is not going unnoticed by our children.

In the end, I feel I was wrong to suggest removing Mr. Rose's presence from the game. I now realize I want the same forgiveness for myself that I originally denied him. But after much contemplation, I still feel it is right to keep Mr. Rose out of the Hall of Fame. I do not want to keep him out because I don't forgive him, but because I feel a responsibility to the next generation. This is not a punishment (as an invite only award, a punishment can only be had if he were previously accepted but later expelled), but a message to our young that our actions lead to consequences. And would that such a lesson were still being taught today.

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