

# Choose the best version of yourself

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Among the things we have lost due to the coronavirus are the first few months of the Major League Baseball season. I have appreciated the chance to watch replays of some classic games – especially game six of the 2011 World Series!

I wish that the baseball films archives stretched further back. If so, I'd certainly watch the game that occurred between the Boston Red Sox and the Washington Senators 103 years ago this week. Walter Johnson, one of the greatest pitchers in the history of baseball - the second best all-time according to "The Bleacher Report" - squared off against a 22-year old Boston left hander. Both pitchers threw a complete game, but Johnson came up on the losing end of a 1-0 score when the young opposing pitcher drove in the only run of the game with a sacrifice fly.

Interestingly enough, despite the fact that the young pitcher finished the season with 24 wins and a 2.01 ERA, it was the last season he would spend as a full time pitcher. The next year, the Red Sox began using him more often as a position player, drastically diminishing the number of innings he pitched. Knowing that this same young southpaw posted a league leading 1.75 ERA the previous season, one might immediately ask why a team would choose to not take full advantage of one of the most outstanding arms in the game. The answer is quite simple – that left arm belonged to Babe Ruth. As valuable as he was on the mound, the evidence had become overwhelming that he was even more valuable with a bat in his hands.

This fun fact from baseball history provides a reminder to me of a spiritual truth. We often think of living a good life as consisting in choosing to do good things instead of bad things. In fact, I have even heard people reflect upon their lives in such a way, "I think I have lived a good life – after all, I have tried to treat people fairly and never committed any felonies."

It is certainly true that not choosing an obvious evil is important, just like one would not choose to take Walter Johnson off the mound and play him at first base. A .235 batting average is OK for a pitcher, but definitely not for any other position. Choosing an obvious good over a blatant evil is an easy decision. It does not make someone a good person. It makes one a person of common sense.

Becoming a good person is more difficult. It requires the discernment and discipline to choose the best over other goods. St Thomas Aquinas once wrote that when we love "riches or pleasure, more than the order of reason or divine law, or divine charity", we show that we are "willing to suffer the loss of some spiritual good so that (we) may obtain the possession of some temporal good." St. Thomas didn't call the things that appeal to us in this realm "bad" things. If God declared all created things "good," then our desires for created things are good desires. But, if these same good things become hindrances to our seeking and discovering the best thing – namely, a relationship with our creator – then we are falling short of becoming good ourselves.

If you had loving parents growing up, you almost certainly heard them tell you at least once, "As long as I know you have done your best, I will be proud of you." Our heavenly Father is just like that. He forgives our failures, and only wants us to seek the best. And, as it turns out, that best is a relationship with Him. To put it back in baseball terms, don't choose to be just a good pitcher if you can become the greatest hitter who ever lived.