

One reason I buy season tickets for the Kansas City Royals is to share them for events like our parish auction this week. I've donated great seats and a parking pass for ten games. I won't feel offended if you take out your phone and bid on them now while I preach this homily. The other reason I buy tickets is I love baseball. It's different from everything else I do; it gives me time off that refreshes me to go back to work.

I could never throw a ball or catch a ball, and God gave me many gifts, but not the ability to hit a ball. I'm amazed at people who can do these things. When I'm at a game, I keep score. On this tablet I record every ball and strike, the location of hits, and the replacement of pitchers. I don't play, so I watch.

Something similar happens in today's reading from Acts of the Apostles. People watched the events in Solomon's portico, a covered walkway outside the Temple in Jerusalem, a shady place to gather your friends.

The first reading on the Sunday after Easter each year records the immediate growth of Christianity under the apostles. Today's passage takes place shortly after Pentecost and includes a key verse that says, "More than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them."

But the verse before that one reveals how people watched. The apostles had become superstars, like sports heroes today. Professional athletes perform in ways that seem to defy nature, and the apostles worked signs and wonders. People carried the sick from their homes even outside Jerusalem, rolled cots and mats into the streets where the apostles were walking, and placed the sick there on the path. "They were all cured." Some positioned the sick in a spot "so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them." Even without physical contact, Peter's shadow cured the sick.

Here's the verse that reveals how people felt about the apostles: "None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them." This is how a lot of us feel about professional athletes: We don't dare to join them, but we esteem them. We leave our homes to draw close to them. If their shadow fell on us, we'd feel like new and tell that story to our friends.

Still, the purpose of apostleship was not to cure the sick, but to proclaim the kingdom of God. Healings made people listen to the basic message: "Jesus is risen from the dead. Follow his teachings. Have hope in eternal life." Not everyone could cure the sick, but everyone could proclaim that message.

Some people who watch baseball games will become professional athletes, but most of us will stand to the side, keep score, and tell others about the game. So in the church, some people become professional ministers, but all of us proclaim the kingdom of God.

On Ash Wednesday we faced our sinful selves and expressed our sorrow. In Easter Time we face our redeemed selves and express our faith. It would be easier to esteem the apostles rather than to join them. But every time we act like Christ and speak up like Christ, we dare to join the apostles. Even our shadow can heal the spiritual sickness of others. When we follow Christ, more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women will be added to him.