

Sacrifice isn't something we sometimes like to think about. But if we want to achieve anything in life, we all know there is no such thing as a genie in a bottle. God gives us so many gifts, but it's up to us to learn how to use them.

Take for instance how Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's record. One of the most iconic moments in baseball history was Hank Aaron breaking Babe Ruth's record of 714 home runs. But what people might not know is all of the sacrifice that it took for Hank to get into baseball, and to persevere as his body aged.

As he was nearing the milestone, he gave an interview with humility but also insight. He says what he finds so hard to believe is that Hank Aaron, a nobody from Mobile, Alabama, is really the first player in 40 years to challenge that home-run record. Who am I to be in this position? How did it come about? He asked. And the answer was with God, sacrifice, and other people.

His parents were strict with the kids. They had rules, they did chores and they all went to the Baptist church every Sunday.

His father, Herbert Aaron, was a boilermaker's helper in a ship-building company and worked long hours to feed and clothe his wife and six children. He didn't have much time to play ball or talk to the kids, but when he did, it meant something. Like the time he skipped school to listen to the Brooklyn Dodger game at the local poolroom. For some reason his dad got off early that day and saw him there. He didn't get mad; he just crooked his finger at Hank Jr. to walk home with him.

Hank thought he was in for it, but his father didn't punish him. He just asked some questions. Like what he was doing out of school and in a poolroom. "I was listening to the Dodger game," Hank Jr. said. "I want to be a baseball player. I'll learn more about how to play listening to the Dodgers than sitting in a classroom."

His daddy wasn't an educated man, but he and his mama had made up their minds that their children were going to get educated. "You don't think those fellows playing in the big leagues are dumb, do you?" he asked him.

"No, but they didn't learn to hit and throw in a classroom," Hank Jr. answered.

"You can be a baseball player and get an education too," he continued earnestly.

They had an old car that was parked in the yard, and they sat in that car and talked and talked. Hank Jr. told his dad he was going to drop out of school when he got a chance to play baseball. He turned around and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Son, I quit school because I had to go to work to make a living. You don't have to. I put fifty cents on that dresser each morning for you to take to school to buy your lunch and whatever else you need. I only take twenty-five cents to work with me. It's worth more to

me that you get an education than it is for me to eat. So let's hear no more about dropping out of school."

Herbert Aaron was always ready to deny himself something if it would help his family. When Hank Jr. was 17 he was offered \$200 a month to play ball for the all-black Indianapolis Clowns. He could hardly believe it.

So one day in May, 1952, his mother, two of his sisters and a brother took him to the Mobile railroad station for the trip to Charlotte, North Carolina, to join the Indianapolis team where they were having spring training. He left with two dollars, two sandwiches and two extra pairs of pants. It was while playing with the Clowns that he encountered a fellow by the name of Jenkins.

Jenkins was a pitcher Hank roomed with him when they were traveling. He was tall and bony with big eyes and real short hair. One night he was about to drink a container of milk when a bug flew into it. Disgusted, he poured it out. Jenkins was watching him. "Aaron, do you know how many people in this world would have given anything for that milk you poured out?"

"There was a bug in it."

"That doesn't matter. Waste is a sin. There are too many starving people in this world for us to waste food like that."

Hank would get annoyed with Jenkins and his preaching at times. They would get two dollars a day for meal money and when they stopped to eat, Jenkins would buy a few slices of bologna and a loaf of bread. He'd eat the bologna and half the bread and then sell the other half to another player.

Then one day after he received the two dollars for meal money, he saw him put one dollar in an envelope and seal it.

"What are you doing that for?"

"Mailing it to my wife," he said. "I send her half my meal money every day."

Hank never forgot that tall, bony, unselfish guy. He'd think of him telling his own kids not to be wasteful. Jenkins, like his father, had that rare quality of self-sacrifice.

Hank also had a strong faith in his life. Hank also said: "I also know this: I need to depend on Someone who is bigger, stronger and wiser than I am. I don't do it on my own. God is my strength. He gave me a good body and some talent and the freedom to develop it. He helps me when things go wrong. He forgives me when I fall on my face. He lights the way. The Lord willing, I'll set a new home-run record. If I don't, that's okay too. I've had a wonderful time in baseball and have enough great memories to last two lifetimes. I have been blessed."

He of course went on to set that home run record, excelling in baseball and more importantly life, through faith, and sacrifice.

This week we celebrate the Ascension. And we hear the word “witness” in readings this week; the apostles are witnesses of what Jesus has done, and now with the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be sent out. But of course with that, they will have to make great sacrifices. They already are leaving behind family and friends to follow Jesus. Now they will endure suffering and hardship and in most cases, death.

The same is true for us who follow them. To pass on the faith requires sacrifice. So much sacrifice is involved in raising a family; in evangelizing and talking about the faith in a secular world and in growing in a relationship with God.

Part of that too is in building a parish. We as a parish family are not here to create a new home run champion. We are here though to create saints and help people on their journey. And to do that, a community comes together and just like Hanks father and teammate, they give of what they have been given to help others.

So many amazing things have happened at our parish through that sacrifice made by so many over the years. Most recently, we’ve built a beautiful beacon on the hill that is our parish and school, and people have so generously given to reduce our debt from \$19 million to just over \$4 in a span of 15 years. And then there are the daily sacrifices made by so many; people giving of their time to serve funeral lunches, to be a catechist or usher or landscape or decorate; the staff who works so hard; our amazing teachers. It’s an endless list.

I wish I could say that now with the new church and school complete, the capital campaign wrapped up, that Saint Joseph’s has reached the finish line. We’re running the race well, but we haven’t gotten there yet.

The good news is so many people have the kind of mentality that Hanks’ teammate Jenkins did as did his father: that of sacrifice and of thinking of others. I recently had a conversation with Dick and Cece Brand, Dick having been here since 1931 when he was baptized, and he shared with me how welcoming the community was to his parents as Germans despite it being very Irish at the time, and of how over the years their children have gone through the school, and both Cece and Dick have volunteered so tirelessly in so many ways in living out their faith. It’s because they and so many have loved their parish that they give of their time, talent and treasure. They see it as family. That mentality helped build our church. And it continues to help it move forward.

Our parish wants to continue to be a witness to the faith and do what Jesus told us to do, to baptize and make disciples of all nations. To be a visible sign of the Ascended Christ in the world. But to do that, it requires sacrifice.

As we look at our upcoming fiscal year, we do face challenges. Even with a budgeted raise of 0% for staff, our budget was projected to be \$133,000 to the negative. This is in part because weekly giving was down \$60,000. And our new campus isn't so new anymore and needs ongoing repairs and maintenance.

Shortly, Craig Francois, a longtime parishioner and also a trustee will come up to share a few more details. I do as well in the bulletin column this week.

The good news is the sky is not falling. Our budget will be balanced one way or another. It has to, for we cannot spend what we do not have. But before we finalize the budget and pull back on services we can provide, it's important to again communicate that this is your parish. People have taken ownership of it for 151 years. I can't tell you what a joy it's been to serve here now for 4 years and see a thriving faith community where people care so deeply about their faith and have such passion. From taking on a project like a new sign for over two years, to our Harvest Festival and School Gala, our parish is such a hub of activity, all because people care so much.

Talking about money isn't something most priests like to do. So I'm careful not to do so too often because people don't come to Mass for fundraising pushes. But what is important to remember too is that as we call Mass a sacrifice, we are also called to sacrifice too for the glory of God. Saint Joseph's is not a for-profit operation. As I said, our mission is simple: to create saints. That can only happen through the sacrifice and generosity of so many. So thank you for all you have given and continue to give!

To give an update on our upcoming fiscal year and where we are at and to share a few words about why he supports our parish, I'd now like to invite Craig Francois up to share a few words. Thank you Craig...