

When I was in about the fifth grade, I got a Christmas present that I got a lot of use out of and to me was the coolest thing in the world, a six-band radio from Radio Shack.

This being the 1980s and long before things like satellite radio, the "Patrolman" from Radio Shack enabled one to pull in different broadcasts from everywhere.

There was the local airport in Crystal, Minnesota I could follow. You could listen to police frequencies. You could put it on the shortwave and listen to the BBC or broadcasts from foreign countries. But the neatest thing to me was the AM band.

Now of course I had another radio or clock radio that got AM stations, but the old six band was a little stronger with it's antenna especially at night, and it was then I, sometimes with my grandpa, would tune into different ball games. I remember being able to listen to the Cubs, the White Sox, the Reds and my favorite out of town broadcaster, Ernie Harwell who was the voice of the Detroit Tigers for many years.

I remember the broadcasters had a way of making the game come alive, and to this day whenever I'm driving, I'll put it on a ball game. Sometimes the Twins, but other times another game going on I may be interested in. Of course these days with satellite radio and a phone app there's no static and I can get all the games I want. And part of the appeal is how the game is described, but how the announcers have various anecdotes they tell are what make the game great. For instance the Orioles guys were talking about which crab was better, that in Seattle or that in Baltimore; the Rangers guys were talking once about thermometer accuracy from the ones sold at Radio Shack, because as they put it, when your team is 20 games under 500 and it's June you have a lot of time on your hands.

The best of the best though most would say was Vin Scully.

I've never been a Dodgers fan - after all they beat the Twins in the World Series. But nonetheless whenever he was calling a game, which was the first three innings on radio before going over to TV, I'd make sure my radio was on the Dodgers Broadcast. He'd be alone in the booth, which was rare. And he had this way of calling the game so you knew what was going on, but it was as if you were having a conversation with your grandfather about various things he experienced; he'd know everything about every player, their family, their hobbies and interests and you'd get caught up in this story within the story of the baseball game. Usually there were multiple stories throughout the game.

However, what most might not know is the story of Vin; and how his faith defined him.

A lifelong devout Catholic, Scully, in an interview he gave shortly before he retired, told the reporter "If you want to make God smile, tell him your plans." He said "That quote has been so much a part of me, I don't know when it began."

It was this leap of faith that caused him to try announcing. Somehow given a “B+” in public speaking in high school by the Catholic nun who educated him, Scully was in the Navy during World War II, but the war ended just as his training was wrapping up. He ended up in college at Fordham, where he played the outfield, including against another guy from Yale named George H.W. Bush. But the radio station at Fordham, still in its infancy, was what captivated him. As a child, he decided he wanted to be a baseball announcer. A doctor told his mom your boy one day will make a living with his voice; perhaps she believed him, but Vin would be captivated by the big family radio, growing up a Giants fan, who at the time in the 1930s were often an underdog. It was that love for the underdog in part that got Scully interested in wanting to be a future broadcaster.

It wasn't easy; he sent out resumes and got rejections, but ended up in his 20s covering college football for CBS where he went around the country getting updates from broadcasters at games all over. He filled in one game for Ernie Harwell, Maryland vs. Boston, and this got the host, Red Barber, to talk to Branch Rickey, Dodgers owner, to get Vin to join the Dodgers. He was 22 years old then and it was 1950. The rest is history as they say; he'd cover Jackie Robinson to Clayton Kershaw. But his life was quite an adventure.

When the Dodgers moved to LA, Vin decided to go out there too with his wife. And his broadcasting turned it into a baseball town; LA was seen as not good for baseball which is why the Giants who moved first chose San Fran. But because of his love for the game and called it in a way people loved, people would listen to their radios at games. He'd cover other sports too, once even filling a few hours of a golf tournament that got cancelled due to rain by being on air with golfers sharing stories. That's talent.

Behind it all though was a Catholic faith that was very deep.

In a story from his childhood he tells where some sisters had to learn how to trust in God's will, he remembers the sisters would wack his hand with a ruler for writing with his left hand. One night at dinner, he's home and passing the bread, and his mother saw his beaten-up left hand. She immediately thought he did something wrong and was being punished. 99% of the time she'd be right, Vin said, but, this time, she was wrong. Vin explained how the nuns didn't want me to use my left hand.

What made it interesting to him when he heard her tell the story years later was that they had a Jewish family doctor named Dr. Rose. He wrote a wonderful letter to the nuns, saying, “If you force this boy to write right-handed, against his natural bent, it could very well cause him to stutter.” And not only that, he finished by writing, “Dear sisters, why would you wish to change God's work?”

That was a grand slam, Vin says, because from that moment on, they allowed him to be left-handed or else that would have changed my life dramatically.

Those nuns realizing that they had to let go and let God was an act of faith too that allowed Vin to become Vin. And over the course of his career, he'd rely on that faith not

only to help him achieve what God called him to do, but through some tough moments in life. He lost his first wife to an accidental overdose and also a son who died in a helicopter crash. He lost his second wife in 2020 after a long illness. But what sustained him in this? His faith. As he said "Faith is the one thing that makes it work, makes me keep going. You appreciate what you've been given. You know, this isn't the only stop on the train. There's one big one we're still waiting for. I used my faith to guide me straight and narrow and strong, for sure. I think about that every week when I'm in line going up to the rail to receive Communion. That's a pretty important moment. It always was and always will be." He'd be a regular at Mass at Dodger Stadium on game days, and on other Sundays at Saint Jude the Apostle Church in Westlake Village, California, where he'd be fed by word and sacrament before he'd go out and bring joy to the thousands listening to him let us know about a beautiful evening in Los Angeles as the Dodgers were about to take the field.

As Eric Liddell, the runner who died in a Japanese concentration camp following his capture as a missionary in China who was made famous in "Chariots of Fire," said "God made me fast; when I run, I feel His pleasure." God put us here for a reason. The challenge is to remember He has plans for us; to listen to Him; to trust in Him; and to see our mission through even when it's hard.

In our second reading this week, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks to us of faith as the "realization of what is hoped for." It was through faith that Abraham obeyed and went out; he left and went to a foreign country; through faith he got the power to become a father; and because of this, the world was changed.

In our lives, like Abraham, faith is not just saying "I believe in God." Rather, it's about believing in God has a plan for you and going on the adventure. The keys for us are to listen to God; to go on the mission and know at times it's tough but he'll see us through; and to remember He is with us always.

This isn't easy; it's far easier to stay in our comfort zone. But when we do this, we'll look back and see what an incredible difference we made on the world.

So the first point is to say "OK God, what do you want me to do?" A bit like the dwarves and Gandalf showing up at the comfy cottage of Bilbo Baggins where he has everything in order and not wanting things to be different, Bilbo realizes he's called to leave the shire, and the same is true for us. When we have faith, we realize God is showing us something he wants to do with our lives. The trust is the key component. We know when we find peace and contentment that we are doing the right thing.

This listening component also involves other people. We must remember God has plans for our loved ones too; our dreams may differ from their dreams and God's plans. As the sisters needed the words of the good doctor to remind them, "why do you wish to change God's work?" Perhaps God is telling you as a parent it's time to let go a bit, or to encourage one child or your spouse more as they chase their dreams; or to be less controlling of someone or a situation. Both with ourselves and with others, it entails

listening, asking God what he wants you to do, and then not being afraid to trust. To take the leap and go on the mission or encourage a loved one to do the same; to get out of the safe space and comfort zone and, like Abraham, to change the world.

This isn't easy. As he was starting, one of the things that impressed Red Barber at CBS was how as the young 20-something Vin didn't complain when he didn't get a spot in the booth but in miserable weather called a college football game from a rooftop. But he persevered, and because he didn't complain Barber then talked to Rickey into hiring Vin to join the Dodgers. When we say yes to God's plan, there will be pain and suffering at times; in life, like Vin, we lose people we care about and are hurt by life. And it's so costly to be married or a parent or to pursue a vocation; it's easier to cling to the familiar. But because of the suffering, so many good things end up coming from that, from our saying "yes" to God. The proof? The Son, who did the will of the Father. The Son who went on that adventure too to save humanity. The Son who is with us always through all of our highs and lows.

One of the quotes from Branch Rickey who was the Dodgers Owner who signed Jackie Robinson was "It's not the honor you take with you, but the heritage you leave behind." Rickey and Vin of course knew one another; Scully said his advice was for him to find a girl, get engaged and get married, because he was worried about the temptations he might face traveling with the team. Vin took that advice. But in real life, like Vin, Rickey let go and let God and dealt with the incredibly tough mission of discerning the time was right to confront racism.

As a player, Rickey had a very forgettable major league career. In fact, he probably wished that more people would forget about the one major league record he set that still stands today: as a no-hit, no-field catcher with the New York Highlanders in 1907 (they became the Yankees in 1913), he once allowed 13 stolen bases in a single game. But as a general manager in the front office, Rickey changed the face of the game in many ways. He was the first to develop the minor league clubs as a "farm system" for his major league club (at the time, the Cardinals). He developed the first full-time spring training facility (for the Dodgers) and was instrumental in making everyday use of things such as batting helmets and pitching machines. He helped found and fund the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in the 1950s. He put together the components of three different teams that went on to win the World Series (Cardinals, Dodgers and Pirates). And then, of course, he changed the face of baseball forever when he signed Jackie Robinson to a contract.

Some have suggested that Rickey was simply trying to find a way to attract even more fans to Dodger games, that his breaking of the so-called gentleman's agreement to ban African Americans from major league baseball was simply a financial issue and not a noble cause. But Rickey was a man of outspoken faith, guided by his Christian upbringing and Methodist roots. His heart had been deeply moved by an episode in his life when he was a much younger man, coaching the Ohio Wesleyan University baseball team.

The team had taken a road trip to play Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. When they arrived to check into their rooms, the hotel manager said to Rickey, "I have rooms for all of you—except for him," pointing to the team's black catcher, Charley Thomas. "Why don't you have a room for him?" Rickey asked.

"Because our policy is whites only," said the hotel manager.

After much discussion between the adamant innkeeper and the persistent Rickey, it was agreed that Charley Thomas could stay in Rickey's room on a cot. After assigning the other players to their rooms, Rickey went up to his room to find Thomas sitting in a chair, weeping and pulling at the skin on his hands, crying out, "It's my skin. If I could just tear it off, I'd be like everybody else. It's my skin; it's my skin, Mr. Rickey!"

That moment seared its way into Rickey's conscience. He was so moved by the young man's despondency and the injustice of his plight that he later said, "For 41 years I have heard that young man crying. Now, I am going to do something about it." And he did. American historians often mark the day that Robinson signed a contract with Rickey and the Dodgers as a major date that helped galvanize the coming Civil Rights movement.

Just as Branch Rickey remembered that young man's great sorrow, Dr. Charles Thomas never forgot what Branch Rickey did for him. Years later, at Rickey's funeral, the officiating minister said, "Branch Rickey has been called the master mind of baseball. His vision made him that. But, he was also the master heart of baseball...He made goodness attractive to others." Isn't that true of all heroes? Wouldn't it be great if people could say that about you?

A good question to ask ourselves too. God is good, all the time. So let us like Vin Scully, like Branch Rickey, not be afraid to go on the mission he's called us to - not necessarily to call baseball games, but to make goodness attractive to others so they can see that faith is truly the realization of what is hoped for, and that hope is what we use to make this world a better place by doing what God has called us to do. It won't always be easy, but when we do just that, what a difference we will have made by working with God to make this world a little more beautiful place, helping others to know what true happiness is - namely, coming to know the God who is love through our words and actions.