



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

A REAL OPTIMIST

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On December 15, 2010, Bob Feller died at the age of 92. He had been blessed with the kind of good health that let him pitch in Cleveland Indians fantasy camps well into his late 80s.

His major league career began in 1936 at the age of 17, between his junior and senior years of high school. He retired in 1956 and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1962. Raised in Van Meter, Iowa by a farming father who taught him the virtue of hard work even as he built him his own baseball field, Feller displayed remarkable arm strength and endurance. He also understood baseball's place in the grander scheme.

On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was the first major league player to enlist. He was awarded medals for his valiant service in the Navy in World War II. He lost four prime years of his baseball career, but never regretted his decision. He often said he was prouder of his service to his country than of his Hall of Fame career. He also said he was a survivor, not a hero; they were the ones who didn't come home.

In a televised reflection on his life, Bob Costas shared a story from the summer of 2009, when he last interviewed Feller. Out of his hearing, Feller's wife told Costas that they had recently put in a new furnace. When Bob pressed for a fifteen year warranty instead of just ten years, she intervened: "Bob," she said, "you're 90 years old. Either way, the furnace will outlive you." "I don't care," Feller replied, "'I want the longer warranty!'"

Feller did not ignore the reality of his mortality. But he did want to stay on "this side of the green grass" as he put it for as long as he could and was determined that, while he was able, he would keep looking and moving forward.

We need his spirit in God's church. We have a greater purpose and prospect than that found in either baseball or country, a reason to live and serve that should make us among the most forward looking. Sometimes, however, we stop moving forward or, what is worse, we look backward. We focus on what we did back when or on our glory days of the past. Cherishing good memories is one thing; letting them replace a present pursuit of opportunities is another.

Paul shows the right way. He had endured much and served well. From prison, he said he longed "to depart and be with Christ." But, until that happened, he would remain active in "fruitful labor" (Phil. 1:22-23). He understood his mortality and never minimized his troubles. But always he looked and moved forward.

He was a real optimist.

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