

Football & prayer

October 14, 2010

When you return to your *alma mater* for homecoming, you desperately want your school to win. But you know you can't pray for that. At least not out loud. Over a public-address system. With fans from the opposing school in the stands.

Even when a nice Baptist school like Hardin-Simmons is playing a public school like Sul Ross State University, you know invoking divine partisanship is just not right. The 27th verse of the third chapter of little-known epistle, III Rockne, states: "God is no respecter of teams. In Christ, there is neither Fighting Irish nor Buckeye, neither Longhorn nor Sooner, neither Crimson Tide nor Bayou Bengal. All are one."

So, whether I want to or not, I can't pray for the HSU Cowboys to prevail over the SRSU Lobos. (And if I *did* decide to pray for a football game, I'd save my prayers to ask God to help HSU defeat its nemesis, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor Cru.)

In a fit of theological irony, I've been praying about what to pray when the announcer shoves a mic in my face. Here goes ...

Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth,

Thank you for creating autumn and its golden afternoons—radiant respite between blazing summer and howling winter.

This October Saturday, we thank you for Hardin-Simmons University and for Sul Ross State University, schools that brought us together. Thank you for James B. Simmons, whose philanthropy helped launch HSU, for John and Mary Hardin, whose generosity enabled it to survive the Great Depression, and for Gov. Sul Ross, whose leadership impacted our state.

Thank you for the faculty, staff, trustees, students and donors who have shaped these fine schools. And thank you for the stewardship of these universities—influence that spans generations and geography.

This afternoon, God, thank you for football. It's why we're here. We revel in the glory of the game, and we're inspired by school spirit. We're here to cheer our teams, and we pray you'll help us cheer vigorously and with gusto. But help us remember it is a game, and Lobos and Cowboys are not enemies. Give us grace to treat each other well. Whether or not the calls go our way. No matter who wins or loses.

Lord, we know football is ferocious. These young men have assembled to knock the living daylights out of each other. May their hits all be clean, and may the strength and the suppleness of their young bodies suffice to endure the blows. Please don't let them get hurt.

Meanwhile, Lord, may they gain many yards, score many points and give us myriad opportunities to cheer.

Guide the officials, God. Help them see clearly, for where there is no vision, fair play perishes.

Also, Lord, bless the World Famous Cowboy Band, cheerleaders, dance squads and students. This contest wouldn't be the same without their enthusiasm and noise.

When we leave, God, grant us safe travels to our homes. And when this game is but a memory, help us to see we live in a world much more violent than football, infinitely more desperate than fourth-and-one, and tragically more tenuous than a goal-line stand. So, lead us to conduct our lives with even more passion than we bring to this game. And may that passion focus on serving others in your name, in which we pray.

Amen.

