

Daphne C. Cody
St. Elisabeth, Glencoe
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Do you really want to be here?

Exodus 32:1-14; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

Chicago Cubs owner Sam Zell hosted a giant World Series celebration for the Cubs this weekend and invited all the season ticket holders, all the players and staff and management team and their families, many members of the press (especially people from the Trib), most of the Cubs publicity people, the vendors that work the stands, North side aldermen and neighborhood leaders, indeed all the real stakeholders in the Cubs enterprise.

Everyone was puzzled. The Cubs got eliminated in the playoffs right away.

What was this? Some sort of publicity stunt? Some sort of joke?

But Zell's people were insistent. "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I've prepared a giant party for my team and the theme is the World Series. Five hundred cases of hot dogs have been delivered, one hundred kegs of beer. The

workmen have put up a giant American flag, and the weather is supposed to be perfect. The Eagles have been flown in to play some party music. The world isn't perfect, we didn't play perfect, but I'm hosting a World Series party and I want them all to come."

No one took it seriously. I mean: really. The economy is in shambles. The stock market's in a free fall. The election ads are fractious, and the electorate is all riled up. Baseball season for Chicago is effectively over. Attention is now turned to the Bears. It's time to move on. Who wants to celebrate when everything is a wreck, most notably the Cubs themselves?

Some of the Cubs staff got really mad at Zell. Where had he been before? A few people ripped into Zell's professional staff, calling them every name in the book. The press was scathing, mocking this plan as ludicrous, calling the party ill-timed and ill-conceived. One headline read: *Zell pitches Crumbs to Cubbies*.

The Cubs owner was furious. He has now sent in his lawyers and accountants and has threatened to pull the plug on the whole club. Since he still hadn't sold the team yet, he stopped the process, and cut off all the talks about deals. He has fired most of the staff and has moved himself in over the president and management to take steps to trade away half the team. He was a no-show at a press conference. How dare no one come.

Zell then said to his secretary, "The party is all set up. Taquería de Carlos has already delivered 800 burritos, the band has arrived, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the neighborhood and invite everyone you can find." So by last night, there were 850 regular Chicagoans whaling on burritos and hot dogs, nachos and peanuts, beer and coke, and celebrating the World Series before it even happens and after the Cubs had been flattened. Zell's people had dragged in everyone they could find, including, believe it or not Sox fans, and, unbelievably, people who *don't even understand baseball*, so that the party was filled with guests.

Things took a turn for the worse when Sam Zell donned a Cubs cap and started toward the giant table set up with an enormous tiered cake shaped like a baseball park. Lots of people were around laughing and talking, but he pinpointed this one guy who was wearing a Sox cap. “Friend,” he said, “how did you get in here wearing that thing?”

You’ve been invited to come in to celebrate the World Series with me. Don’t you know where you are and whom you’re with? Don’t you know that when you get to be as near to heaven as you can possibly imagine that you need to at least act like you belong here? Don’t you know that when the Owner throws a party, you need to at least be aware of where you are and how you got here and by what grace you are eating that burrito and drinking that beer?

You may be where you never in a million years expected to be, you may be here at the last minute and eating sacred food and drink that you never in a million years expected to eat. But that's no excuse.

Find your bearings, Friend. Put on the right ball cap. Look around you and figure out what's happened here this night. What did happen when you entered here? Did no one give you any direction? Did no one care that you were wearing a Sox cap? Were you not met with truth in clarity?

The guy in the wrong cap was speechless. He was drunk already and stuffed with burritos. He didn't even know who Sam Zell was. "Whatever, man, it looked like a cool, free party...whassup, is this about the Cubs, dude?"

The security guards were called, who escorted the guy out of the party and threw him into the outer darkness, where all the rest of the party-poopers had gone, where there was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Many say they love the Cubs, but few really get it.

(Breathe)

This is a hard parable, my sisters and brothers at St. Elisabeth's, and one that ultimately says this:

True desire for God is the one article of clothing that cuts through all of our differences, in experience and in understanding. True desire for God is what puts us at the Great Banquet, and it is what keeps us there. And the wearing of that desire goes not only over the skin, but to the heart.