

Here's hoping: Mundane events can mirror the mysteries at the heart of faith

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Red Sox fan George Sumner was on his deathbed last October, and things didn't look too good for the Red Sox either. They were about to be eliminated from the playoffs by the hated Yankees, thereby adding another year of heartbreak to the previous 86 in which Boston's beloved Sox had managed, sometimes in jaw-dropping fashion, to fall short of winning the World Series. George Sumner held on to life, his family suspected, partly because he wanted to see if this might be the year the Sox would win it all. Against all odds, the Red Sox did just that, winning four straight from the Yankees and then sweeping the Cardinals to win the Series. George Sumner died the next day, after first indicating that he had glimpsed this Sox moment of glory.

George Sumner did not actually quote Simeon's canticle, "Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, my own eyes have seen your salvation." He just whispered "Yippee!" But that passage in Luke 2, one of the readings for the post-Christmas season, would not have been out of place for the fans across New England who at last saw the victory they longed for and wondered if they would live to see. *Sports Illustrated* (December 6), which recounted Sumner's vigil, reported that many Boston fans celebrated by visiting the graves of family members, acknowledging a communion of hope which transcended mortality.

Sports analogies can be overdone, but sometimes mundane events mirror the mysteries at the heart of faith. Mirrored, in this case, is the mystery of eschatological hope.

For the faithful, often disappointed but ever hopeful fan, as for the believer in God's coming kingdom, the trials of each season are not discrete episodes, but part of a continuing narrative. The names of the players change, but the cause remains

constant, renewed in each generation.

For the faithful fan, as for the believer, the coming of the kingdom is ultimately out of one's hands. Yet this does not deter one from watching and praying and doing all that one can to make it happen.

For the faithful fan, as for the believer, the coming of the kingdom promises some kind of redemption. How redemption works remains hard to say, even for the theological experts. Can a great victory erase all the excruciating errors that went before? Does triumph "buy back" the days of failure? Does the final victory really cast a whole new light on all those ignominious losses? That is the promise. It doesn't make logical sense, but it seems to happen that way. Ask any Red Sox fan.