

Autumn lament: The liturgical calendar and the baseball calendar

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 17, 2006](#) issue

For those of us who measure time not only by the liturgical calendar but by the baseball season, fall is a time to reflect on what happened or did not happen. It is a painful time once again for those of us who invest ourselves in the fortunes of the Chicago Cubs. The Cubs have not been in the World Series since 1945 and haven't won a World Championship since 1908. We are approaching a pathetic centennial. Our only consolation is that the team did not lose 100 games this season and was not—not quite—the worst team in Major League Baseball.

We started April with high hopes—a starting pitching rotation that looked like one of the best, some solid veterans and promising acquisitions at key positions. Now we remind ourselves that it is easy to love a winning team. It requires no strength of character to be a New York Yankees fan. St. Paul could have had Cubs fans in mind when he wrote: “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

Like other Century book issues, this issue contains recommendations that will help me decide what books to purchase. For those who are beginning the wait for spring training, I can recommend two additional books. Leigh Montville's *The Big Bam: The Life and Times of Babe Ruth* is a well written, carefully researched biography of one of America's great characters. It is also a fascinating social history of the early 20th century. “Big Bam” is what his teammates called this larger-than-life figure, one of the icons of the game. Babe Ruth, by the way, never read a book—not even the two he wrote.

The other book is *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*, by David Maraniss. Roberto Clemente, born in Puerto Rico, played right field for the Pittsburgh Pirates for 18 years. Students of the game contend that he was one of the best ever to play the game and was adept at every facet of it. The Pirates were my first baseball love, and when Clemente joined the team they suddenly became contenders. Incredibly to those of us who followed them through years of mediocrity,

the Pirates rose up and beat the New York Yankees to win the World Championship in 1960, and won it again in 1971 by defeating the Baltimore Orioles. Clemente got a base hit in every World Series game he played. His total hits numbered 3,000 when he died on New Year's Eve 1972 in a plane crash as he was attempting to deliver food and medical supplies to Nicaragua after a devastating earthquake.