

BLACK CATHOLIC NOVEMBER 2022 HISTORY MONTH

BLACK CATHOLIC ARTISTS & ATHLETES

St. Pius V
ANTI-RACISM
& EQUITY

*rooted and grounded in
the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*



St. Pius V Catholic Church
November 13, 2022



ROBERTO CLEMENTE by Tom Sanger

Roberto Clemente was born in 1934 in Carolina, Puerto Rico, the seventh child in his working-class family. He played 18 years for the Pittsburgh Pirates and had an illustrious career.

What was it that made Clemente larger than life — and makes him larger in death? At root, it was arguably the quiet intensity of his Catholic faith. He did everything with intensity, and almost everything seemed to revolve around baseball. But baseball was not something removed from his faith. “I am convinced,” he once said, “that God wanted me to be a baseball player. I was born to play baseball.” Clemente’s friend Father Cheetham told a journalist: “We know [Clemente]

was a great sports figure, but more than that he was a great humanitarian. He was a good, religious man. That’s what we should remember.” Roberto’s wife Vera agreed.

He developed a local reputation for helping children and poor people. He made frequent hospital visits. He was also extremely generous to panhandlers. His friends would sometimes protest as he handed over a 10 or a 20, but Clemente would respond, “The Lord put me on this earth to help people.” In the Fall of 1972 the Clementes returned, as usual, to Puerto Rico. On December 23 they heard the news that Managua, Nicaragua, had been devastated by a major earthquake. The government in Puerto Rico asked Clemente if he would serve on a committee to provide relief. He agreed and threw himself into the task. He booked the plane and loaded it, made plans to accompany that first shipment to Nicaragua on New Year’s Eve. The plane took off as scheduled, but never arrived at its destination. It crashed into the ocean immediately after takeoff, killing the crew, Clemente, and a friend who had accompanied him. His body was never recovered.

The Roberto Clemente Award is given each year to a MLB player who emulates his compassion and humanitarian efforts in helping the community. Yadier Molina, Adam Wainwright and Albert Pujols have won this prestigious award!

REFLECTION by Vince Estrada

When I was in the 1st grade, I was introduced to the game of baseball by my father, Vicente Estrada Sr., and fell in love with the game right away. I was especially drawn to the players from Latin America. My dad had seen many of them play winter ball when he was growing up in Cuba, and I loved hearing stories about them. However, the player I was drawn to the most didn’t even play for our hometown team. I absolutely was enthralled by Roberto Clemente. Beyond his athletic prowess, I was most struck by a statement he made regarding his status as a professional athlete: “Any time you have an opportunity to make a difference in this world and you don’t, then you are

wasting your time on Earth. I am convinced that God wanted me to be a baseball player....”

This notion of God given gift to share with others was a new way of thinking. I started to think about my own gifts (for the record, it certainly was not baseball!) and a responsibility I had to not only develop these gifts, but to share them with the world. Were these just empty words, or did Roberto Clemente truly believe this with all of his heart?

When Roberto Clemente died in 1972 delivering much needed supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua, I was stunned. But I also recognized that this was a man of his word. He truly used his gifts and gave his life to make a difference in the world, and I began to see the connection between sharing one’s gifts in the services of others. It has been nearly 50 years since he died off the coast of Puerto Rico, but his legacy lives on. The name Roberto Clemente, a great player, is most closely associated with the award that now bears his name and honors those persons who make a meaningful “commitment to their community.”