



## Joe Garagiola – A man of great humor and deep faith

By Dennis Heaney  
7/5/2007

### The Christophers

High on the list of people that I've long wanted to meet is Joe Garagiola, former major league baseball player, broadcaster extraordinaire and member of the Broadcasters Wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame. For many years I've admired Joe's talent for telling hilarious stories that come from his long association with baseball, as well as for a deep commitment to his Catholic faith.

I finally got to meet Joe recently when he was a guest on our "Christopher Closeup" show. What a joy and privilege it was not only to spend a couple of hours with him, but to also find that, in person, he is as genuine – and funny – as he comes across on television and in his books. He's easy to visit with, quick with stories and very comfortable talking about his faith journey and his love for Mary, the blessed mother.

For those of you who are too young to remember (and more and more people are!), Joe began his baseball career with the St. Louis Cardinals, his hometown team. He was signed right out of high school and received a bonus of \$500 which he immediately gave to his father so the senior Garagiola could pay off the mortgage on their home. Joe told me, "When I gave him the money, it was the only time I ever saw him cry."

Joe grew up across the street from another baseball legend, Yogi Berra. "I can't remember not knowing Yogi!" That's Joe's answer to how far back they go. His "Yogi stories" have become his stock-in-trade during a very successful career on the speaking circuit as well as his decades of work as a baseball color broadcaster on the Major League Game of the Week and now with the Arizona Diamondbacks.

If you don't know about Yogi Berra's fame for quotes that make you go "Huh?" then you've missed some great entertainment. For example, Joe Garagiola tells how Yogi's wife Carmen asked her husband (who is now 82 years old) if he wanted to be buried in St. Louis, where he grew up, New York, where he gained fame and fans as a player and manager, or New Jersey, where he raised his family and now lives. Yogi told her, "I don't know. Surprise me!" As Joe says, you can't make this stuff up – and "Yogi doesn't. He just talks and they come out."

The role of his Catholic faith in Joe's life is central to the way he lives. Prayer starts his day. Each morning he asks God to help him see the ways he can be

God's hands to people he meets. "I don't go through a lot of formal prayers. I just talk to God like you and I are talking now."

When I asked where his devotion to the blessed mother started, Joe said that he heard Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen say on television one evening that in a family, if you want to ask your parents for something you go first to your mother. Joe said that after he met Archbishop Sheen and they had become good friends, he told him how much that advice meant. Archbishop Sheen said that he was simply passing on what the gospel story about the wedding feast at Cana told us. The servants told Mary that they had run out of wine, she told Jesus and then told the servants to do as Jesus instructed. She knew he'd listen to her request and, Archbishop Sheen told Joe, that's the lesson for us – talk to Mary first.

Joe Garagiola uses his God-given talent to make people laugh and, in the process, helps make this a better world. Thanks, Joe!

- - -

Dennis Heaney is president of The Christophers

- - -

For a free copy of the Christopher News Note, "Be a Good Sport – Keeping Athletics in Perspective," write: The Christophers, 12 East 48th St., New York, N.Y. 10017; or e-mail: [mail@christophers.org](mailto:mail@christophers.org).