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Sports fans: Beware of confidence in superstitions

By **FATHER JAMES FARNAN**

I watched the American Football Conference divisional playoff at the home of my friend and his wife. When the Steelers won, they insisted that I return the next week, wear the same clothes and sit in the same seat. I politely declined, and the Steelers won the AFC championship anyway.

Supporters of the Steelers are becoming more and more caught up in "Super Bowl fever." We are distinguishing ourselves as some of the most enthusiastic football fans in the country.

Fans' involvement in the success of any sports team is natural. Such teams represent cities and schools and unite communities. Let's face it: Successful teams bring joy and are a pleasure to watch.

Growing out of this desire to be involved in the success of our favorite sports team is the thought that if we wear a certain article of clothing, or sit in a certain place, or eat certain foods, or do anything that we may have done at another time when the team had success, then we can, through our actions, influence the performance of the team. This is known as superstition.

While most superstitions are meant to be part of the fun and are not serious (my friends did not seriously believe my presence at their

house would change the game's outcome, but it was fun to play along) superstition itself should be avoided.

Superstition is a deviation from reality. It is the attribution of importance in some way magical to certain practices. It is the unreasonable belief that correlation has causation, or that some action can somehow affect or control the outcome of unrelated circumstances. Superstition gives a kind of religious attention, devotion and respect to something that is untrue and imaginary.

The pre-Christian pagans believed that God was an unstable power that required acts of placation. Pagan men and women lived in fear that the whims of the gods would turn against them and terrible things would happen. The acts of placation offered by the pagans were done to avoid these terrible things.

Christians, however, benefit from the revelation of Christ. Our understanding of the authority of God is significantly different from the pagans. Christ revealed that God is all-knowing and all-powerful, as well as all-loving. God's providence respects our freedom and does not demand our placation with threats of injury or harm. Instead, God invites us to a relationship that calls for commitment and communion. Christ invites our acts of devotion, religious attention,

commitment and respect to be directed to the one true God; a piety that is fueled by love, not by fear of punishment.

When Christians participate in superstition we deviate from Christ's revelation and distort our understanding of the influence and majesty of God. A Christian's understanding of God will be corrupted by an unhealthy confidence in superstition, and superstition eventually undermines our respect for love and our communion with God.

The fun and games associated with following our favorite teams usually do not devolve into sinful superstition. It is, however, a cause for reflection as the Super Bowl approaches.

During this time when our support for the Steelers escalates, and our desire to see them win increases, we need to be cautious about allowing superstition to become part of the healthy benefits we receive from being sports fans.

If by providence and superior effort the Black and Gold win in Detroit, they will bring the Super Bowl trophy to Pittsburgh. As Chuck Noll might say, let's act like we've been there before — and not like a bunch of pagans.

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