

# The Big Catholic



Perhaps the best player in one of Major League baseball's best teams, the 39-year-old slugger says he owes his life to his Catholic faith. "The Big Cat" spoke with *Register* correspondent George Devine Sr.

**Devine:** There has been a lot of publicity about your illness and recovery last year. You missed the entire 1999 season with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, but you are obviously doing well now.

**Galarraga:** Yes, God and the Virgin helped me to stay alive, to get well again, and to come back to play baseball.

I was praying a lot last year when I was sick and remained focused and positive. I had a dream, with God carrying me between my bed and my living room, in my home in West Palm Beach and I prayed, "God, please carry me." And I tried to look up to see him, because he is so beautiful.

When I was waking up I

was sweating, and I felt I could see God. I felt I was getting strong. I told my wife Eneyda about the dream, and she and I began crying. I felt God carrying me through my treatment and my recovery and through working out. I feel strong now, and I feel the presence of God.

We are Catholic in my family and we are really strong in that, in everything we do. We believe that whatever happens is for a reason, so when something good happens we want to say "Thank you" to God.

**What was your recovery program, in addition to prayer?**

Well, the cancer was in my lower back. It was very painful,

and I had to have radiation chemotherapy, and had to go every three weeks to be examined. But you have to be patient, to stay focused and keep praying. That is what I did. I kept praying to God and the Blessed Virgin.

After the first two or three times [the cancer] was 75% gone, and they thought it was amazing. But the cancer is gone now. Everything is great and now I can come back and play baseball.

**You don't want to deny the doctors their credit, but you seem to think this was really the work of the Blessed Virgin?**

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## 'The Big Catholic' Thanks Virgin Mary for Cure

*continuing front page story*

Yes, no question. I give a lot of credit to the Virgin Mary and to God. I know that the medicine was good but after that dream I know that God came into my body to make me feel strong and get better.

**You live in West Palm Beach, Fla., most of the time now. Is that where you worship?**

Actually, I go back and forth between there and my home town, Caracas [Venezuela], and I like to go there when I have time, especially for holy days like Christmas. I come from a strong Catholic family and we celebrate the holy days of the Church with one another.

We have three kids — Andria is 14, Katherine is 9 and Andrianna. Andrianna is only 2 years old so she is not old enough to go to school. But my two older kids go to Catholic school there and that is the parish where we go to Mass, except



Atlanta Braves' first baseman Andres Galarraga, shown sliding into home plate, credits his recovery from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma to Mary's intercession. (CNS photo)

when we go in Caracas.

**As a father, do you have any special message for young people,**

**especially those who admire you and other athletes?**

My big message is to keep praying, at least five minutes every day,

to God to thank him for everything he gives to us — our food, our lives, our families being healthy. You have to stay focused on this. That's the main thing for young people and for everyone else also. Keep praying, stay positive and do that for life and think about the kind of person you want to be.

**Speaking of young people: We know that recently Pope John Paul II observed his 80th birthday, and is celebrating the Jubilee Year for the Church. Now, he has welcomed a record number of young people, most of them about a quarter of his age, to an enthusiastic celebration at Rome. What thoughts on these events?**

God bless him. I certainly wish the Pope many more happy birthdays and I hope he will continue for many more years to give us that strong leadership that he has been giving us in our faith.