

A Case of Courage

Collegiate basketball has just concluded its Final Fours. Throughout the season and in the tournaments, the word, "courage," often was used to describe the manner in which a player performed -- aggressiveness on defense or driving down the lane among the "big bodies" to put up a shot. It's a term often used in all sorts of athletic endeavors.

Let me give you an example of real courage. Charles Colson, in "Loving God," tells the story of Telemachus, a Christian in the Fourth Century.

Telemachus lived in a remote village, tending his garden and spending much of his time in prayer. One day, he thought he heard the voice of God telling him to go to Rome, so he obeyed, setting out on foot. Weary weeks later, he arrived in the city at the time of a great festival. The little monk followed the crowd surging down the streets into the Colosseum.

He saw the gladiators stand before the emperor and say, "We who are about to die salute you." Then he realized these men were going to fight to the death for the entertainment of the crowd. Telemachus cried out, "In the name of Christ, stop!"

As the games began, he pushed his way through the crowd, climbed over the wall, and dropped to the floor of the arena. When the crowd saw this tiny figure rushing to the gladiators and saying, "In the name of Christ, stop!" they thought it was part of the show and began laughing.

When they realized it wasn't, the laughter turned to anger. As he was pleading with the gladiators to stop, one of them plunged a sword into his body. He fell to the sand. As he was dying, his last words were, "In the name of Christ, stop!"

Then a strange thing happened. The gladiators stood looking at the tiny figure lying there. A hush fell over the Colosseum. Way up in the upper rows, a man stood and made his way to the exit. Others began to follow. In dead silence, everyone left the Colosseum.

The year was A.D. 391, and that was the last battle to the death between gladiators in the Roman Colosseum. Never again in the great stadium did gladiators kill each other for the entertainment of the crowd, all because of one tiny voice that could hardly be heard above the tumult. One voice, one life, that spoke the truth in God's name. That was courage.

--Beecher Hunter