

Today I am going to give a controversial homily . . . I'm going to discuss the differences between Huskies and Cougars. I'll offend both before I'm done. Most of you know my story, but for those who don't – I went to WSU my freshman year then transferred to the University of Washington and graduated from there. But, while a Husky, I have no anti-Cougar feelings. That being said, when I go to the gym or go running I wear UW work-out gear . . . until seminarian Ben moved in.

Ben is a Cougar fanatic. Cougar stuff pretty much makes up his wardrobe. He wears the same thing every day – a good sign of a priestly vocation, by the way. Well, Ben got sick of seeing me in my UW shorts and t-shirts – so as a Christmas present I received from him the gift of Crimson and Grey shorts and shirt, the full Cougar outfit.

But here's the interesting thing . . . I've been wearing the Cougar gear about a third of the time this past month. The results have been fascinating. When I wear UW stuff nobody notices. It's expected and accepted. But with the WSU clothes it's different. People notice – at

least certain people notice – the Cougar Nation. Several times in the gym I've walked past guys in Cougar wear and they've softly said as we passed, "Go Cougs!" It was like I joined a secret brotherhood. The woman at the front desk of the gym had to do a double take (since I always wear Huskies gear) "Is that Cougar stuff? Go Cougs!" And in the grocery store a manager said when I was in my Cougar stuff, "I didn't recognize you – you always wear UW stuff. But I'm a Cougar too!"

My point in all of this is that we're dealing with two different communities here with different feels. The Huskies (Sorry, Cougs, but it's true) dominate this relationship. Their school is bigger, with a better academic reputation. They come from Seattle, a hip, internationally desirable city to live in. The Cougs are from Pullman – a few thousand people in the middle of wheat fields. There is a football rivalry, but the Huskies dominate it. Now, WSU is good enough to win once in awhile, but when they do they go crazy with joy. When the UW wins not so

much – at most they make a joke about the losers. The peasants have been put in their place again.

But, even though they're in the weaker position, the Cougars have a stronger community and identity. They know who they are. They bond. That's what I experienced wearing those grey shorts and T-shirt. And that brings me to our second reading. "Consider your own calling brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something." The Cougars are like these Corinthian Christians. The WSU alumni might think this is going too far (foolish, weak, despised?). And Huskies would certainly snort at the thought of the hard-partying Cougars as ancient Christian stand-ins. But Paul is writing to the new Christians of Corinth – a very worldly city. He's writing to a

bunch of Nobodies in a city filled with Somebodies – and saying those roles are reversed in the Kingdom of God.

Here's my point, although the Cougar alumni may not want to admit it, it's precisely in their weakness that Cougars draw their strength of community – and their cool. In their relationship with Wazzu the UW is the powerful force of the world – Corinth – compared to the Cougar-Christians. And what Paul writes in I Corinthians is just the consequences of what Jesus teaches in the Beatitudes. Do you think being poor in spirit, meek, merciful, clean of heart, a peacemaker, are the world's values for winners?

But Jesus and St. Paul are saying there is something better than winning the world's game. When I said that the Cougar experience I had this month is cool, I meant it. I don't want to make too much of a few comments, but in terms of Christ and the Church and there is something powerful in the communion of the Body of Christ.

The Beatitudes end with the promise of the reward that comes with persecution (I think Cougars feel a little persecuted in western Washington). That Beatitude seems out of place on the list unless we realize that there is a real rivalry, not just an Apple Cup rivalry, between the World and the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised if we, as Catholics in western Washington, sometimes feel out of place, a minority, looked down upon. Two thousand years later we're still living in Corinth – and always will. We should recognize that living for Jesus will mean the worldly powers will see us as foolish, weak, despised – and that we lose more often than we win.

But the greater compensations and consolations of the faith are our victory, found in the bond we share, not only with God Himself, but with others who follow Christ. There is a communion, warmth, and charity that can come from our shared faith. So let us show that to one another as we cross paths in the world, in Corinth – not by quietly

saying, “Go Gougs!”, but perhaps, “God bless you,” when someone reveals in subtle ways, a crucifix necklace, a turn of phrase, his or her membership in the Body of Christ. It’s cool to know that there is that invisible bond the world cannot see that connects us to all our brothers and sisters in Christ.