

## ***“Let us Evoke Human Decency and Compassion”***

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(As Nano Nagle’s example still evokes widespread compassion for those made poor today...may *we* evoke compassion from others to do everything within their power to care for Earth: this Earth which is “*among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor*”.\*)

This past Monday evening my wife and I were looking for something to watch on TV. As it was January 2, she suggested that we search for a possible bowl game of college football. While there was not one to be found on our very limited TV we did come across “*Monday Night Football*” on ABC. It was a professional game already in progress between the Cincinnati Bengals and the Buffalo Bills. Just a few plays into our watching, one of the players for Buffalo, Damar Hamlin, became critically injured.

Growing up in San Antonio I myself was an all-conference football player for St. Anthony High School Seminary. Luckily, I was never seriously hurt, although I took (and gave) my share of big hits. Today I am no longer a fan of NFL games, although Regina and I do enjoy the excitement of college football matchups.

The on-field aftermath of Damar Hamlin’s injury this past Monday night was something very different from anything I’ve seen. As described by legendary broadcaster Joe Buck who was calling this game: “*It certainly was nothing that anyone is ever prepared for. You have all that hype and buildup, and everyone can’t wait to watch this matchup, and in the snap a finger it’s completely different. Football just goes out the window.*”



Buffalo Bills players huddled in prayer after their teammate, Damar Hamlin, collapsed on the field on Monday at Paycor Stadium in Cincinnati. Credit...Dylan Buell/Getty Images

Indeed, everything not only paused...but stopped. Hamlin's injury was such that *everyone* was suddenly and immediately focused on something very different than a game. It went from a setting of entertainment to bare reality...from a concocted contest of "war in the trenches" to a very real scenario of life and death. The ambulance came, life-support was administered, players not only surrounded Hamlin but all of them were openly weeping. This poignant scene on the field continued for what seemed like an hour. Commentators were at a loss for words, but all agreed that the setting now was not about football...

Although I had never heard of Damar Hamlin, I too feared for his life. At the same time, I found myself quite struck and moved by this rare scene of players, coaches, fans and announcers being so *uniformly* shocked and so many publicly focused on prayer.

That evening the game was postponed...and has since been cancelled.

While witnessing all this on Monday night, I could not help but ponder an ultimate sign of our times that is also currently being played out: **planet Earth** (like Damar Hamlin) **is right now on life support**. Only, in *this* very real scenario, we are not only *not* stopping, we are not even pausing. As a whole we are *not* focused on this very real life and death situation, we are not reaching out across divisions to link hands nor taking a widespread knee in prayer. When it comes to the end of the biosphere it seems we actually prefer that the “game” continue.



Logging and farming are pushing rainforests around the world, including the Amazon, to the breaking point, warn experts. *Photo: Reuters*

I only pray that the widespread outpouring of real human decency and compassion that arose and prevailed in such a huge economic setting as that of an NFL game---be summoned and awakened in response for our critically injured Earth.

With the injury of Damar Hamlin - Monday night suddenly was not about football anymore. With Earth's condition now critical let us ponder what is real and stop the game of denial and exploitation that is exacerbating her demise.

### Endnote

\* Pope Francis in "*Laudato Si*" paragraph #2