

"A Confession of the Legendary Lou Holtz"

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Before a Notre Dame-Miami football game, a chaplain of the Miami Hurricanes said, "God doesn't care who wins football games." When he heard this, Lou Holtz replied, "God may not care, but his Mother sure does."

If you were to go on a random Tuesday to Mass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at the University of Notre Dame in 2026, you'll see long lines of people (mostly students) waiting to go to confession. But in the mid-1990s, when I was a student, you could generally walk right up with little or no line. One day, I stood as the only person waiting to enter the confessional box. A moment later, up walked Coach Lou Holtz. He took the next spot in line.

Lou was a legend. He led the Irish for eleven seasons as head coach, including an undefeated season in 1988. I had seen him from the third to last row at the Fiesta Bowl when they won the National Championship, but now he was right next to me.

I wasn't entirely surprised. I had heard that he was a practicing Catholic, attended daily Mass, and said the Rosary regularly. He was influenced from his earliest years by the Sisters of Notre Dame who taught him in grade school, "The Sisters . . . influenced my life tremendously," Holtz once said. "This was due to the fact that they encouraged you always to make sure that God is the focus of your life, and they didn't allow you to do anything except to the very best of your ability."

Of course, it is almost impossible always to do everything to the very best of your ability and keep God as the center, so here Holtz was waiting to go to confession.

It's generally bad form to talk to people as you wait in line for confession, but I couldn't resist.

"Coach," I said to him, "I'm sure you are much more busy than I am. Please, go first ahead of me."

"Are you sure?" "Yes, I'm sure. Please, go in next."

So we switched spots in line. Holtz turned back to me, "Is there anything I can do for you?" Now, that's a question anyone loves to hear. A myriad of possibilities popped to mind. But I thought immediately of my stepfather-in-law.

So, I replied, "My father-in-law is a huge fan of yours. Would you mind sending him an autographed picture?" And he said, "Yes, I'd be happy to." Then the penitent left the confessional box, and the coach entered.

When Holtz was done with his confession and left the confessional, he thanked me again and went on his way. Later that day, I dropped off my father-in-law's address at the office of the head football coach.