

Jeers to cheers

The CBS News program 60 Minutes recently interviewed Tim Green, a retired football player who had been a star on defense for an NFL team, but now was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease. Apparently the countless blows to his head caused the onset of this neurological disease.

He had some difficulty speaking. He had other difficulties with walking.

The interviewer asked: "Is there anything in your life that you would change?" He responded: "No!"

Green went on to explain that "The experience of hearing 60,000 people cheering for you is unlike anything else." Apparently, the cheering was like a drug. He was willing to sacrifice his life for it.

By contrast, Jesus was born with little notice. He was simply one more baby, born in the humility of a stable. Yes, angels sang his praises, but only to humble shepherds watching their sheep.

As an adult, Jesus did attain a popularity with the crowds, so much so that they wanted to make Jesus king. In response, He left and hid in the hills. Jesus fled from what we so often seek.

The only final cheers he received were the jeers tossed at him when he would hang on the cross.

What did Jesus know that we sometimes never learn? He was aware that the presence of God was inside him: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21).

There's nothing wrong with being praised. If you're a good parent, a good worker, a good friend or neighbor, you likely will be praised at some time. The problem is not the praise. The problem is when we allow the praise to define us. As a philosopher put it: "We look into other people's eyes to see who we are." Praise is meant to help us, not to define us.

Christmas is a chance again to discover who we are. God came into the world in the

form of a baby because God always comes into the world that way. Every birth is a miracle. Every baby is an image of God. The challenge of life is to discover the miracle of God always with us.

And if we haven't noticed the presence of God in others in the past, today is a time to look again. So as we peek into the stable of Bethlehem, we realize that we may be seeing ourselves for the first time. Jesus had no crowds cheering for him at that time. We need no crowds cheering for us to tell us who we are. All we need is faith and love, and then we know.