

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

~ Luke 6:36

After the title match between Manny Pacquiao and Antonio Margarito was signed in July, trainer Freddie Roach holed up for hours to study the fight films of Margarito. As he watched and analyzed his style, he began to compare performances. Soon suspicions mounted. He concluded that Margarito's gloves were loaded against two opponents –Kermit Cintron and Miguel Cotto. "You look at those guys after the fight, Roach said, "It looked like a truck hit them. A few of his own fighters had sparred with Margarito during that time and what they told him connected the dots of his theory. Rashad Holloway, one of those fighters, considered suing Margarito. He suffered a broken eye socket while training with the former welterweight champion about two years ago. "I don't think he's really recovered from that yet, said Roach. Had it been his decision, Margarito would have been suspended from boxing for life after he was caught cheating in January 2009. Instead, Roach gave a bitter nudge to karma: "I hope Manny Pacquiao kicks his a** for all those people [he hurt] out there.

Margarito was taken by ambulance to the hospital early Sunday morning. The facial injuries he suffered included a broken nose, cuts and severe swelling around the eyes, and a broken orbital bone –that is, a broken eye socket. He spent the night under the care of physicians. He remains there as of this writing.

The fight didn't begin badly for the bigger man. After the third round, Margarito returned to his corner and said "he can't hurt me. Then the bell rang for the fourth and within moments it became painfully clear that Pacquiao –notwithstanding dramatic size and strength disadvantages, could hurt him. Margarito emerged from an exchange with a damaged right eye. Two minutes later he emerged from the round with a new CompuBox record: he had never before been punched more times in one round. His hubris, before and during the fight, seemed to have a price in blood. A crowd of 41,000 watched a beating that would have won the approval of any subscriber to the Law of Retaliation.

In nearly every minute of the next six rounds, Margarito was taken apart by an offensive machine that some might have mistook for the Hammer of Justice. By the end of the tenth round, Margarito's face was bludgeoned into a mask of disfigurement and pain. The roars of Cowboys Stadium were like echoes across nineteen centuries, blending with the roars of the Flavian Amphitheater in anticipation of a finality most brutal. The referee stopped the action a few times to ensure that Margarito could see out of his right eye but did not stop the slaughter. When it became clear that his corner would not intervene either, only one figure was left to stand between Margarito and the shadow of death –and it was the most unlikely one.

Sugar Ray Robinson is the greatest fighter that anyone alive has ever seen. In 1947, his fists killed Jimmy Doyle in a title bout. Robinson was horrified. The coroner asked if he "noticed that Doyle was in trouble at any time. Robinson's answer is the answer of any man who fights for a

Onward, Christian Soldier

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living: “—Getting him in trouble is my business.

Manny Pacquiao responded strangely. He responded not as a gladiator but as a practitioner of the Golden Rule. He knew that Margarito was no longer a threat to anyone but himself, and sensed that the man was in mortal danger. In the eleventh round he stopped punching, looked at the referee, and pleaded for mercy. “Look at his eyes, look at his cuts, Manny told him, and then us, “I did not want to damage him permanently. That is not what boxing is about. Despite the exhortation of the crowd and the glory that would come with a late-round knockout of the most menacing fighter he ever faced, he began punching less and pulling his punches.

...Manny carried Margarito.

“I feel pity to him, said the greatest fighter of this generation.

I feel pity to him.

His mother named him Emmanuel —which means “God with us and hoped that he would grow up to be a Roman Catholic priest. She armed her son with the disarming faith of the Christian poor, the complete faith of those whose frailty is ever before them, whose survival is dependent on God and human kindness. It is said that when you are flat on your back, you have nowhere to look but up. And it is a matter of record that the Almighty looks down. This God of sparrows and small things “raises up the poor from the dust, Psalm 113 reads,

lifts the beggar from the dung hill,
Seats them with princes,
the princes of his people.

This champion and congressman was once destitute on the streets of Manila. Today’s mythical fists were once miserable hands opened for alms. He remembers when he himself was on the brink of collapse —and he remembers who carried him through it.

He felt pity for Margarito because he knows that Margarito is him.

The wisdom that Manny has taken from a religious mother and his own life experience begins with humility; it whispers to him like a slave riding beside a conqueror in an ancient Roman parade: memento mori —“remember thou art mortal. This conqueror knows how dangerous pride is to the human soul. “That’s the problem of being human, Manny said in a recent interview, “the person’s success of his career. I feel happy but I won’t put [that] in my head because if you put that in your head, you’re going to be crazy: ‘Oh, I’m Manny Pacquiao’... You can be changed of what you are before. With feet planted squarely on the ground, Manny looks askew at anyone puffed up enough to actually believe that their success is their own doing.

All power, he believes, is given from above. His is no exception.

Two thousand years ago, someone special told his ragtag band of followers that the power of faith can move mountains. In overcoming the sixth straight champion above his natural weight

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division, Manny proved him right yet again. This time, his faith moved Margarito. Margarito, whose blood atonement was right out of the Torah; Margarito, who was carried in the last round almost as gently as a good shepherd would carry an injured lamb –or a broken man.

“I know God is always by me, Manny told the world, “I always praise God before ...everything.

Amen.

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Freddie Roach’s statements were given in an interview with the host of “In Depth, Graham Bensinger. Manny Pacquiao’s statements were derived from HBO interviews. Special thanks to William Mogensen for playing devil’s advocate.

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