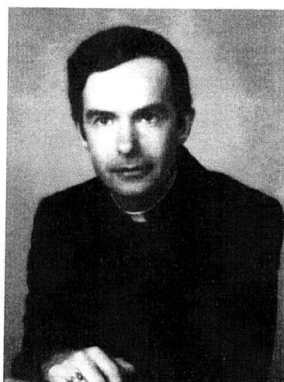


Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd...



While driving through the countryside one afternoon, I spotted a coyote crossing a field. I stopped to watch him and he paused to look back at me. Resuming his trek, he continued to look back instead of where he was going and stumbled into a hole. That must have been

Likewise, historians who spend too much time looking back and not where they are going with the data they amass risk falling into a rut like the coyote.

Knowledge of history is of inestimable value if we make practical application of it. Without knowing from where we have come, we lack the necessary orientation to live effectively in the present or plan strategically for the future. Life would be analogous to being lost amid the trees of a pine forest or the dunes of the Sahara Desert. However, history is not a destination; we cannot live in the past. This is a pitfall for some historians. For example, students of the WBTS get bogged down in splitting hairs over which bank of a stream a certain incident occurred or how many miles per gallon of oats Lee's horse got. They stop short of making the connection between the past, present, and future, reducing the benefits of their research to the dryness of desert sand and losing their readers and/or listeners in a forest of trivia. They never get around to explaining what is the purpose and point of it all.

Last month, Christians observed Ash Wednesday. Ashes of burned palms from a Palm Sunday of the past were used to trace the sign of the Cross on the foreheads of penitents in the present and give them hope for the future. Through this act, we reflected back on Christ's Passion, contemplated our current mortality, and looked toward the future with a strengthened sense of forgiveness and renewal, for "...if one is in Christ, he is a new creation." (II Cor. 5:17) We are now in the midst of Lent, 40 days of spiritual discernment in preparation for commemorating the central event in human history - Pesach (Easter). As this holiday (holy day) draws nearer, we experience a heightened sense of expectation for the comfort and security that

what has been can be again. As time passes, ancient truths and traditional rituals are anticipated more eagerly and appreciated more deeply. We develop a deeper understanding that makes them more meaningful. Through Christ's Passion, redemption was offered to mankind. Even though this took place nearly 2000 years ago, the power of this historic event continues to change lives in the present and give hope for the future.

On that first Sunday, not knowing that Christ had risen from the dead, a group of women went to the tomb to anoint Christ's body. Finding the tomb empty, they returned to tell the disciples. Consequently, Peter and John ran a race to the tomb hoping to find Christ. Peter was in the lead, but John outran him. Hesitating to enter, Peter passed John and entered the tomb first; then John followed him. Once inside, we are told that they "...saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that He must rise from the dead." (Jn. 20:8)

The author of the Epistle To The Hebrews wrote, "... (L)et us run with perseverance the race that is set before us..." (Heb. 12:1) Like Peter and John, we are all running the race of life that ends with physical death, symbolized by the tomb. Some of us will outrun others to reach and enter it first. Those dear to us who placed their trust in Christ and preceded us in departing from this world we do not leave farther and farther behind in the past. If we also place our trust in Christ, then with the passing of each day we are moving closer and closer to them and where they now dwell with Christ. St. Paul wrote, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it." (I Cor. 9:24) What is the prize, the object of our hope, that we run to receive? Unlike Peter and John, the souls of those who do know the scripture, that Christ has risen from the dead, experience an infusion of hope, one of the three theological virtues. Hope makes the disappointments of life bearable and gives us the ability to dream, to explore the potentials and opportunities of this life and eternity. We experience hope before present realities are experienced or memories of the past are formed. But as adults, we tend to temper our hopes and dreams by allowing doubt, fear of loss, and pain to impose boundaries on our aspirations. Hope is the

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antidote that overcomes doubt, fear, and pain. As necessary as air, water, and food, without hope we cannot live life in this world or anticipate eternal life in the next. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick..." (Prov. 13:12) For Christians, initially by conversion and ultimately through entry into the tomb, we encounter the resurrected Christ as the disciples did before His ascension. This is our blessed hope, based on trust (faith) in the promises of Christ. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) Thus, with practical application, knowledge of the past gives us confidence in the present and hope for the future.

Fr. Richard W. Rudd