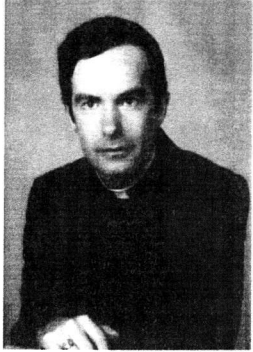


## Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd



As some stories traditionally begin, it was a dark and stormy night and Christ's disciples thought they had seen a ghost. They were out on the Sea of Galilee in a boat being "...beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them." Christ "...came to them, walking on the sea."

He greeted them saying, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear. And Peter answered Him, 'Lord, if it is You, bid me come to You on the water.' He said, 'Come'. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.'" (Mat. 14:24-30)

Christ compared life on earth in the latter days to "...the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear..." (Lk, 21:25-26) Christians, as Christ's disciples in the 21st century, are living in turbulent times. Life is more complicated and changes are accelerating at a faster pace. Competing ideologies and temptations abound. Fear and despair are more prevalent. In these circumstances, Christ says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be my disciple." (Lk, 14:27) The crosses we bear come in many forms.

Regarding the crosses of fear and despair, David said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." (Ps. 23:4) Except for the last verse, which is written in the future tense, all of this psalm is written in the present tense. We enter and pass through the valley of the shadow of death every time major trials are encountered. But, those trials are mere shadows, intimidating specters of tribulations that can be vanquished by Christ Who proclaims, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn. 8:12)

Christians around the world are experiencing virulent attacks- -criticism, discrimination, and persecution. They are enduring "...a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so

treated." (Heb. 10:2-33) What should be Christians' response? "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Tim. 6:12)

Crosses also come in the form of internal struggles and afflictions. The pursuit of wealth, power, fame, and sensuality becomes an obsession. It is easier to follow the crowd, doing what is popular and meets with the least resistance, to indulge old habits, and grow accustomed to unlimited freedom to follow your own heart. Syncretism, the irrational deception that all religions lead to the same deity, allows one to avoid having to make definitive spiritual decisions. Christ says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many." (Matt. 7:13)

Even the weight of legitimate responsibilities and aspirations can become crosses that divert our attention from spiritual concerns. The perspective from the vantage point of youth tends to be shortsighted, focusing on recreation, academic goals, a successful career, marriage and family, finances, and a secure retirement. Time needed for the care of one's spiritual wellbeing is crowded out of a busy schedule. Consequently, psychological traumas and suicides are filling the void created by failure "...to set the mind on the Spirit..." (Rom. 8:6) Our spiritual welfare should not be deferred to old age as a last choice of necessity. Christ advises, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, ...but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven..." (Matt. 6:19-20)

As St. Matthew gave us his account of the disciples striving against a wind on the Sea of Galilee, so Daniel tells us about a dream in which he saw a vision of winds, representing contentions and tumults, stirring up a sea, symbolic of the world. (Dan. 7:2) We who are Christ's disciples are blown about on the sea of this world by winds stirred up by the allures of sinful gratification, the aspirations born of dreams, and the burdens of assumed responsibilities. Like Peter, we are able to navigate through the storm as long as we keep our focus on Christ. It is when we allow the winds of the storms of life to blow

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us off course, to distract us, that we fail to keep our focus on Christ and become disoriented and afraid.

In biblical numerology, 40 signifies preparation. As the forty years spend in the wilderness prepared the Israelites to renew their faith in God and deal with the challenges presented by the Canaanites, the forty days of Lent prepare us to renew our faith in Christ, pass through the wilderness of our world, and deal with the challenges with which we are confronted. Lent is not only a season to prepare for the celebration of the Paschal high holy days, it is also a time to reawaken our consciousness, to repent of worldly distractions, to regain our orientation, focus, and sense of direction, to reorder our priorities, and to rediscover our true purpose in life. "Therefore ...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us..." (Heb 12:1) "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things." (I Cor. 9:25) So "...let us...lay aside every weight, and sin." Let us discipline our lives with charitable deeds, study of the scriptures, prayer and meditation, and worship of God so that we can say as St. Paul. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (II Tim. 4:7) Then, we can look forward to hearing Christ welcome us into His presence by saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant..." (Matt. 25:21)

***Father Richard Rudd***

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