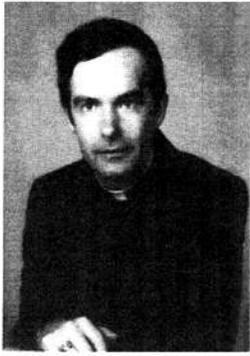


Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard WRudd



This month on the church calendar marks the beginning of Lent, 40 days of observation starting with Ash Wednesday and extending to Pasch (Easter). As God led the Israelites through the wilderness during the Exodus, preparing the nation for entry into the Promised Land, so He leads

Christians through the 40 days of Lent, preparing us to enter Heaven. Comparing a Christian's spiritual development to an athlete's physical training, St Paul said, "...I pommel my body and subdue it..." (I Cor. 9:27) While a Christian's development in the faith does involve physical discipline, the ultimate purpose of Lent means much more than abstinence from material sources of sensual satisfaction. It reaches beyond the body to the soul, beyond the material to the spiritual, beyond the temporal to the eternal. "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against...the spiritual hosts of wickedness..." (Eph. 6:12) Lent is a time to strengthen our defenses in those areas where we are most vulnerable and temptation attacks: our needs, won't, weaknesses, and ignorance. The combined accumulation of education, experience that accrues with age, and a knowledge of history gives us perspective in our view of life. Lent designates a time for us to assimilate this information in order to reorient our opinions, beliefs, values, and priorities.

Seeing is not always believing. My first encounter with holograms was viewing a theatrical scene in which the image of a young woman, who was obscured by a partition, was projected into a room with the use of lights, mirrors, and glass. Viewed from a short distance, she appeared to be walking around in the room as a corporeal three-dimensional being. Closer inspection would reveal her image was intangible; she was not there. The same effect was created using a box lined with mirrors. When an object was placed in the box, it appeared above the box as a concrete image. Reach for it and it would vanish. Mirages appear to be water in the desert and rainbows as arches in the sky touching earth, both creating the same effect.

Life in this world is the endless pursuit of a series of holograms. We strive to grasp what appears to

be real and permanent, only to see it slip through our fingers and elude the best efforts we can devise to hold on to it. The accumulation of wealth and power is an endless and insatiable pursuit. When J.D. Rockefeller was asked how much money he thought he needed, he responded, "Just a little bit more." Before telling the parable of the foolish rich man, Christ said that "...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Lk. 12:15) Solomon, a rich and powerful man, reflected, "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity..." (Eccles. 2:11) "I hated all my toil..., seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me..." (2:18) He continued, "... (S)ometimes a man who has toiled... must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it." (2:21) Others seek to erect the facade of a good reputation and fame built with honors and titles, like the tower of Babel and the people who said, "... (L)et us make a name for ourselves..." (Gen. 11:4) Solomon observed, "For of the wise man as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten." (Eccles. 2:18) "His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the streets." (Job 18:17) We used to commemorate the life of JFK on the day of his assassination and the lives of those who were killed at Pearl Harbor. Today, those anniversaries are barely mentioned. The memory of the heroic sacrifices of our Confederate ancestors is fading as successive generations edit and rewrite history, creating a hologram using proverbial smoke and mirrors to project a false historical record and image of themselves and their agenda. Comfort can no longer be reliably found in returning to familiar places and landmarks. Buildings are torn down, landscapes are reconfigured, Christian symbols and Confederate statues, flags, and even graves are removed. "As the cloud fades and vanishes, so (man)... returns no more to his house, no more does his place know him." (Job 7:9) "He has no offspring or descendant among his people, and no survivor where he used to live." (18:19) "A generation goes, and a generation comes..." (Eccles. 1:4) Even those who have children eventually become mere genealogical statistics, having no emotional bonds with their descendants in the not too distant future. While we are mortals in this world, we are similar to

a hologram. The radiant glow of a youthful countenance, strength and agility of movement, clarity of sight and hearing, and reliability of memory fade away. "Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow." (Ps. 144:4) "The eye of him who sees (us) will behold (us) no more; ... (we) shall be gone." (Job 7:7) "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more." (Ps. 103:15)

Life in this world is to experience a hologram. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." (I Cor. 13:12) Now we can only discern imperfect reflections and distorted images from a distance. But God "...has put eternity into man's mind..." (Eccles. 3:11) The time is coming when we as Christians will have clarity of vision and knowledge free from error, seeing things as they really are. As Christians' mortal images weaken and fade, their spiritual images become stronger and more clear. "Therefore, if one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (II Cor. 5:17) We normally think of this world and all that it has to offer as reality. However, those who have had NDE's (near death experience) and seen Heaven return to tell us that Heaven is more real. This is why Christ tells us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, ...but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven...For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt. 6:19) It is lessons learned, formation of good character and spiritual development, selfless good deeds, and creation of caring relationships that are treasured in Heaven and last for all eternity. "... (T)ime and chance happen to (us) all. For man does not know his time." (Eccles. 9:11) Even though we do not know what the future will bring, we must try to prepare for the unknown and the inevitable. To each man in every generation, Joshua admonishes to "...choose this day whom you will serve..." If our heart and what we treasure is in the right place, we will echo the response of Joshua that "...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15)

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