

### ***CRIBBS NOTES – August 19, 2007***

Almost every week for more than a month, news of death has come to my ears. Friends, colleagues, co-workers, and parishioners have transitioned into the realm of ancestors. It feels like a season of death. It does not get easier with each telephone call. In fact, each one deepens my own sense of mortality and reminds me again of the frailty and flight of human life.

At the same time, each death takes me back in memory to times when voices were clear, bodies were strong, and laughter bellowed unabated. Each face, though now blurred or faded, brings a mixture of smiles and tears as I remember sharing tender moments. Names are inked in my mind attached to places and events that cannot be replicated. Each one is unique and uncommon. All are part of the mosaic that is a jagged corner of personal history.

No doubt, all of us have similar sagas that comprise the whole of our reality. Even if we have forgotten details of experiences, there is sufficient residue remaining that a flicker can re-ignite a long ago episode. Amid harried tasks and unfinished business, a slight jolt can take us away to a distant flash that carries us to the presence of someone no longer among the living.

Perhaps they were not part of the large scheme of human history. Only a few people were touched and transformed by their brief tour on Earth. Yet, they came into your life and made such a difference that you were forever changed. You are who you have become because they crossed your path. They may not have possessed the illusionary characteristics of a comic book superhero, but their spirit of compassion knocked you off balance. They were people of faith who looked beyond themselves and saw you and others. They cared about innocent ones, who suffered because of circumstances separate from themselves. They took a risk, got involved, and you will never forget them.

Ancient legends encourage us to examine our lives to make contributions that benefit contemporary society, and, hopefully, propel us to leave a legacy for generations unborn. That is the point of the story in the Book of Hebrews as familiar personalities are recalled to inspire the community of believers to keep on keeping on.

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson writes about Hebrews 12:1, “Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on wit hit. Strip down, start running—and never quit!”

Life is not a sprint. It is more like a marathon, but its beginning and end are not on a timeline we fully understand or know. Before we were born, the substance of our lives already existed. Beyond our demise, others will pick up the torch and carried it on. That is the matter of things presented in the Hebrew text. The “cloud of witnesses” preceded our entry into this immediate consciousness, and now serves to urge us to go faithful onward. They tell us, “Don’t be afraid.” “Don’t give up.” “Put your trust in God.” “Love one another.”

So, while there is sadness because comrades have crossed over, there is an undeniable, inexplicable joy seeping through my soul as my faith informs me of God’s great love and preparation for us all. So long, dear friends! You have kept the faith, finished this journey, and have joined the host of faith witnesses.