BASEBALL

April 4, 2005

My Brothers,

"The value in life is not in how long you live it, but in how well you live it." I don't know who said that. It was probably the Greeks; they seem to have said about everything at least once and then argued about it - and someone else said that about the Greeks. There's a whole world of topics and thoughts out there, and it seems that it has all been said before. Despite that, we can be original these days even when things said seem to have been said before. And with some topics, it doesn't matter if it's been said before because the saying is the important thing.

For instance, take baseball. It seems there is always something that's fresh to say, though the game has been around for 150 years or so. Baseball has evolved from sandlots to ball parks, from kids to professionals, but the balls and strikes, outs and innings, and general rules have remained about the same. Players, teams, and leagues have come and gone, but the game goes on. Writing and talking about baseball has grown up along with baseball and has developed a rich history, theories, and even a philosophy of its own. It is written about and talked about in every media and argued at the office water cooler. It has historians and even its historians have historians. Could Abner Doubleday have imagined a Baseball Hall of Fame, let alone a Baseball Writer's Hall of Fame?

One of the things that keeps it fresh is a natural focus on the things that change: the players, the managers, the teams, and the games. Controlled change is one of the things that helps keep it alive. Another is that baseball is broad enough in its scope and wealthy enough in its history to interest almost anyone. There is always some new or different observation that can be made about the playing of the game, then, or now. There are even comparative theories about baseball's different eras. How would Babe Ruth have done if he had played today with the watered-down pitching? Would Barry Bonds be feared as a slugger if he had to bat in the 'dead ball' era? There seems to be endless things to say about baseball, even if it's been said before. Maybe Yogi Berra's, "It's deja vu all over again.", is a good thing.

And now, I'll make the pitch you know is coming. Here comes the heater down the middle of the plate, full count, two out in the ninth, bases loaded: There is always something interesting to say about Masonry even though it's all been said before. In Masonry, like baseball, we know the players, the teams, the leagues (think Brothers, Lodges, and Grand Lodges). We know the unchanging rules and the things that can undergo controlled change. We have Masonic history and historians and we have historians who write about other historians. We have Masonic theory and we can compare different eras in Masonry. We even have a water cooler if we want to swap Masonic stories.

When you look at it, Masonry and baseball have a lot in common. It takes a certain something to be a Mason and practice and dedication to be a proficient Mason. We have managers and coaches who try to bring out our best. We have a bench along the sidelines supplementing our team that watches and supports, or heckles us when we deserve it. And we practice our skills to get them right for when it counts and to be as good as we can be for our own satisfaction and the good of Masonry. We also share a common problem, attendance. Yogi Berra once said about attendance, "If people don't want to come out to the ballpark, nobody's going to stop 'em." I doubt that any Greek ever said that, but I bet a lot of Masons wish we could stop 'em from not coming to Lodge!

It's been said that baseball is not a game, it's a way of life. And, yes, our philosophy says Masonry is a way of life. In anything we're doing that's a way of life, the value in living comes down to how we live it. If we channel our passions and our interests into doing the things that need to be done, and doing them well, then we are living life well. And there is satisfaction in that, as Leonardo Da Vinci said, "Life lived well is long."

My Brothers, Masonic life is our game. We don't have to be a Lou Gehrig or Cal Ripken to be an "Iron Man", to be counted on to be there, day in and day out. We just have to get in there and do it.

That's the pitch. Step up to the plate and swing away.

Br. Stephen C. Harrington