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## *Spring Training*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

It's time for baseball again.

This is the time of year I make my formal apology to non-sports fans everywhere, especially to non-sports fans who are reading The Cathedral Times newsletter. It is time for me to rejoice in the ritual of baseball's spring training. I suppose I must also apologize to the fans of other sports, those sports which are ever so noble but regrettably inferior to baseball.

As our winter takes another chilly turn, baseball players gather in Florida and Arizona for spring training. Seasoned veterans and raw rookies all have hope in their veins. They will make the team this year, after years of "almost." All the batters believe that batting .300 is achievable. All the pitchers believe 15 wins or 20 saves is achievable. Everyone's home team has a chance to win the pennant. All baseball fans, from the wisest newspaper writers to the most naïve local fans, take a renewed interest in the home team. Baseball in the spring is the very definition of "hope springs eternal."

Hope and endurance are the foundations of success in baseball. Baseball is the sport for those who can endure, and hope is the source of that endurance. Baseball is the sport of endurance. First off, of course, is the sheer length of its incessant schedule. Even the worst professional team will play 162 games this year. The difference between a first place team and a second place may turn out to be one game among those 162.

Baseball is the sport of humble aspirations. By "humble," I mean down-to-earth. There will be no such thing as a team that wins every game, or even a batter who gets a hit in every game. In fact, the expectations are much more "down-to-earth," "humble." A successful batter needs to get a hit only 30% of the time. A player's inner hope and emotional endurance will inspire him to return to the batters' box after he has made seven outs in a row. After all, three successive hits in a row would then give him that ongoing .300 batting average.

Baseball will test the endurance of fans, too. It takes a lot of time to appreciate and enjoy the art of baseball. Fewer and fewer of us tend to devote much time to anything these days. We prefer the quick e-mail message, the short phone call, the casual glance at the newspaper or the television news. The game of baseball introduces long periods of no action into the game. A play itself lasts only twenty seconds; and then we all wait two or three minutes for the next play. By then, many of us have changed the channel.

But the art of baseball lies in appreciating those moments between the actual plays. For the game of baseball is the thinking and strategizing over how that play will develop. How do the fielders position themselves? What pitch does the pitcher throw? What will the batter anticipate? Who is scheduled to bat next inning? Who is warming up in the bullpen? The play itself is quick; the art-the discipline-takes a lifetime.

I could go on, just like baseball goes on and on. But if you've read this far, you deserve the closing Christian analogy. The analogy is that we all need Spring Training. We all need to get our muscles and training routines back into shape. We all need a review of techniques and strategies. We all need to work on what we are supposed to meditate on "between plays,"

or between crises. We all need to renew our hope and our endurance.

In the church, we have another name for this Spring Training. We call it Lent. It's time to get our aching prayer routines back into shape. It's time to renew our hope. It's time to focus on what God really wants us to do in this life. We call it Lent. It is the intentional training of our spiritual lives, so that we can succeed in the long season of resurrection life.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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