

# Former POW's letter stirs memories of war friendships

By Fr. Paul Cuddy  
Courier columnist

In 1946 Willi Franken was an 18-year-old prisoner of war in Compiègne, France, where I was a chaplain for the American troops. We have kept in sporadic correspondence for 45 years.

His most recent letter to me was written in German so I had it translated by Rose Wolf of St. Ambrose Parish. The goodness and innocence of his youth emanate from him even to this day.

"Dear Father," he wrote. "I was very happy to hear from you after so long a time. I thank you for your letter of Christmas, 1990. Many friends will remember gladly the correspondence you



## ON THE RIGHT SIDE

had with them over 50 years. I am happy that I count as one of them.

"I have a picture of you hanging in my room, which is also my office. It reminds me of 45 years ago (in the prison camp in France.) Not only did I have you, but also many American soldiers as good friends. It made me miss my own home less. Many

times in my prayers I thanked God for that blessing.

"Thanks to the United Germany now, I found my friend again from the Compiègne camp days. We lived together in my tent and were very good friends. Last year he came to visit me with his wife. Those were beautiful days. It was so good to bring to somebody joy and make them happy who never knew the good standard of living in the West. With tears we held each other.

"In the church where I am organist, we have a new priest. He is 57-years-old and a very dear human being. It is so joyful the way he celebrates Mass. The attendance has gone up 50 percent since. The reason for that no doubt is that the retired priest,

who was a Hollander, did not master the German language very well.

"I do enjoy my retirement and pray that God may bless me with a few more years of good health and contentment. I wish you everything good, especially in health and God's blessings."

**Comment:** Wars make strange relationships, but they demonstrate the universality of human nature. We all have a universal love of home, family, friends and country. Military life is probably the greatest "binder-together" of men in the world. We each shared mutual experiences, joys, sorrows, gripes and thoughts of home.

As a young soldier, Willi was so innocent and clean-cut that he would have made a picture of the model American youth for the front page of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Evidently his goodness has persisted.

When Willi was going back home to Moenchengladback with our American troops, young Red Potts, my assistant, was his military guard to see that he arrived correctly. They had become good friends. Both youths had similar ages and backgrounds.

Like most places, the personality of the parish priest can be an important factor in the spirit of a parish. A devout, cheerful, selfless, serving priest is a boon.

"Would you like to become a priest?" I asked an altar boy, who was about 13-years-old.

He contorted his face and answered me with a resounding "No!"

I wonder why he had such hostility to the question. Will some one explain that to our readers, to our bishops and to me?

## Jesus offers proof of resurrection on many levels

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 24:35-48; (R1) Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; (R2) 1 John 2:1-5.

The Gospels for Easter and the two following Sundays aim to prove the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.

If the apostles were going to preach the resurrection, they had to be convinced of it, not just intellectually, but also from firsthand experience. They had to see, hear and touch Jesus. Even eat with him.

Our Lord understood this so he gave such evidence. Thus on the first Easter, he stood in their midst. He appealed to their hearing: "Peace be to you," he greeted them. He appealed to their sight: "Look at my hands and feet; it is really I." He appealed to their ability to feel: "Touch me, and see that a ghost does not have flesh and bones as I do." And he appealed to their common sense by taking and eating cooked fish before their eyes.

And so these fishermen, who weren't visionaries and whose five senses had never been dulled by overindulging on food, drink or inactivity, were convinced by Jesus that he was truly risen. They not only saw this, but they also saw that it was the same old Jesus. He was the same Jesus they had known before his death and resurrection.

Here was Jesus speaking words of peace, as usual, and bringing peace by wiping away the sin that destroys peace. Here he was still mildly chiding their disbelief. Here he was familiar as always: "Touch me, and see." Here he was still patient and understanding.

A great teacher was once asked, "What is the first condition for successful teaching?"

"Patience," he answered.

"And the second?" he was asked.

"Patience," he replied.

"What's the third?" he was asked.

"Sympathy," the teacher said after pausing a moment. Patience and sympathy were always the hallmarks of the teaching Christ.

And what were the effects of his resurrection?

The first effect was peace.

Secondly, the banishing of fears and



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

doubts.

Thirdly, the refreshing of their memories: "Recall the words I spoke to you when I was still with you."

The fourth effect was that he opened their minds to the understanding of Scriptures.

And lastly, he told them their mission was to be witnesses of his resurrection and to proclaim to everybody else that — because he was risen — every sinner can from now on rise from sin.

In the first reading, we see St. Peter doing just that: "Reform your lives! Turn to God that your sins may be wiped away!" By reform, he means to change your lifestyle and your way of thinking. Make God, not television, the center of your lives.

When he said to "turn to God," he

meant to choose God and to reject Satan. Then choose the means God gave on the first Easter to wipe away sins: the Sacrament of Penance. Even if an angel from heaven comes and tells you not to go to confession, let him be cursed.

Every Sunday at Mass, Jesus comes and stands in our midst, just as he had done for the apostles on that first Easter. Like them, we, too, might have fears and doubts. But the Lord is kind and merciful, patient and slow to anger.

So he comes Sunday after Sunday to give us peace, to banish fears and doubts, to open our minds to the understanding of Scripture, and to strengthen and nourish us with the bread of life. He does this so we, too, might become witnesses that his resurrection is a fact because we have risen from our sins.

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