

Memorial Day
The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Monday, May 31, 2010
Homily

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Davison, Michigan

Memory is a tricky thing—particularly as we get older.

You may know the story of three people who were talking:

The first said, “Sometimes I go to the refrigerator and forget what I need by the time I get there.”

The second person said, “When I go upstairs, I can’t remember whether I’m going up for something or I’m on my way back down.”

The third person said, “I’m lucky, knock on wood. Is that someone knocking on the front door?”

Memory is a tricky thing but there are some things that we should never forget. We need to remember the debt we owe to others. You and I do not have what we have today by our efforts alone. There is no greater myth than that of the self-made man or woman. We owe an enormous debt from the moment we came into this world. Some of that debt is owed to the young men and women who shed their blood on battlefields. Many of them gave their lives because they truly believed that freedom is worth dying for.

To honor this sacrifice is not to glorify war. War is the ultimate blasphemy against God. Still, we live in a cruel world where tyrants would impose their will on others. It would be nice if we lived in a world where people always played by the rules, where no one coveted his neighbor’s property, where we would never have to depend upon military might to enforce justice. But we do not know what dangers may yet await us.

When the War Between the States flared up, a young Texan enlisted and marched off to fight with his friends. “We won’t be gone long,” he claimed, “‘cause we can lick them Yankees with broomsticks.”

Four years later, when the fighting was finally over, the young man came home a beaten man. One of his neighbors asked, “What happened? I thought you were going to beat them Yankees with broomsticks.”

“We could’ve,” replied the young man, “except we couldn’t get ’em to fight with broomsticks.”

It would be nice, now that the Cold War is over, if we could totally eliminate our defense establishment with the knowledge that no nation would ever commit aggression against its neighbor again. But that’s not the way the world is.

Today we remember the young men and young women who have been sacrificed in the cause of one noble ideal after another. We honor the memory this day of those who have given their lives believing that they were making the world safer, freer, and more humane.

Of course, there are others who have given their lives for us who never wore a uniform, never carried a gun. Did you know that in the 20th Century, the century in which most us were born, was the century that had more martyrs to the cause of Christ than all the centuries put together before it? We sing “The Litany of Saints” today. While we remember those who have died in battle, we also need to remember committed followers of Jesus. They died in battle, too. The battle between light and darkness. The battle between truth and falsehood. Their sacrifices remind us how anemic our own cost of discipleship is. They gave their all. We dare not forge them. We remember them.

And so we remember...

We remember those who died that we may live in freedom.

We remember those who died that we may live in faith.

It is a time to remember and it is a time to finish what they started.

They were shooting the movie *Yankee Doodle Dandy* on the day after Pearl Harbor. The cast listened as President Roosevelt announced on the radio that the United States was at war with Japan and Germany. At that point, director Michael Curtiz came on the sound stage with Jimmy Cagney and they all listened for the national anthem to finish. As the women dabbed tears from their eyes and the men

were deeply moved, Curtiz said in his best Hungarian accent, “Now boys and girls we have work to do. We have bad news, but we have a wonderful story to tell the world. So let’s put away sad things and begin.”

That’s our challenge too. We remember with sadness and gratitude the sacrifice others have made on our behalf. Now we go out to tell our story. Memorial Day is primarily a national holiday on which we remember and honor the men and women for having given their lives for our country. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.” It is fitting and proper for us to observe Memorial Day not only as Americans but as Christians. By Divine appointment we are members of a home, of a community, and of a nation just as to be Christian is to be a member of the Church of Christ.

What does Memorial Day mean to you? What emotions are stirred in you as you are reminded of our national heritage?

