

HOMILY

Memorial Day

Monday, May 26, 2008

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

Memorial Day is primarily a national holiday on which we remember and honor those men and women who have 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 Catholics. There should be no conflict between our loyalty to our God and our loyalty to our country. These loyalties enforce each other. For God has not set us to live our lives in isolation or privacy. By divine appointment, we are members of a home, of a community, of a nation, just as to be Catholic is to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. To live as God intended us to live, we must fulfill our obligations in each of these spheres.

No one has expressed the spirit of today any more eloquently than President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg. I would like to highlight three thoughts from his address. First is the *appreciation* of a great heritage:

“...our fathers brought forth upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

The land which the Fathers of our nation have bequeathed to us is the land of liberty and equality. The flag which they lifted over it is a flag which stands for freedom of thought, of speech, of conscience, of worship. And it represents the right of every citizen to enjoy these freedoms and equal opportunity to make the most out of his God-given capabilities.

The Founding Fathers accepted this liberty and equality as a sacred trust from the hand of God and taught us to praise the power that has made and preserved us as a nation. Are we worthy heirs of such riches? Do we prize them so highly that we constantly thank God for them? Do we appreciate the high privilege of American

citizenship, and do we make responsible and constructive use of it? We Americans of the twenty-first century tend to take our freedom for granted. We need to recover the reverent appreciation of it which the Fathers had and which Lincoln had.

The second thought from Lincoln is the *acknowledgement* of the price paid for our heritage. We remember those honored dead who gave their “*last full measure of devotion,*” who gave their lives that this nation might live.

Memorial Day calls us to pay respect to the brave men and women, living and dead, who have fought to preserve the nation. We are compelled to count the cost of our heritage in terms of the lives of fathers and sons, in terms of widows and orphans. Our American way of life has been purchased at a high price.

We say thank you today to all the men and women who have placed their lives in jeopardy for us. We honor those who are now serving our country in uniform. We gratefully remember the veterans who responded to their country’s call in the hour of danger. If we have caught the vision of Memorial Day, we see not only the parades of today but also the invisible parade of heroes marching from Valley Forge and Gettysburg, as well as the battlefields of the present century. Soldiers whose blood has nourished the soil from which our freedom is sustained and grows.

When the train bearing the body of Abraham Lincoln to its final resting place stopped at the railroad station in Albany and crowds gathered to get a last glimpse of the martyred president, a poor black woman lifted up her little boy above the crowd and said, “Son, take a long look—he died for you!” Just so, we try today to take a long look and view with reverent respect all those whose lives are the price of our heritage.

The third thought from Lincoln is *consecration* to the task of preserving our heritage. The great president asks us, the living, to be dedicated to the unfinished work which the heroes so nobly advanced. He pleads that “...from these honored dead we take increased devotion” to the cause of responsible freedom, and “...*that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom....*”

The purpose of today is to awaken us to rededicate ourselves to the unfinished work before us, to set our house in order, to do all we can to achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

One further word must be spoken about our purpose today. Today is a day when we remember not only our soldiers but also all our loved ones who are no longer with us. They, too, have entrusted us with a sacred task—to rededicate ourselves to the unfinished work before us.

I would like to conclude my remarks today with a true story. The great statesman, Winston Churchill, had planned his funeral, which took place in Saint Paul's Cathedral. He included many of the great hymns of the church and used the eloquent Anglican liturgy. At his direction, a bugler, positioned high in the dome of Saint Paul's, intoned after the benediction the sound of Taps, the universal signal that says the day is over. But then came the most dramatic turn. As Churchill instructed, as soon as Taps was finished, another bugler, placed on the other side of the dome, played the notes of Reveille—"It's time to get up. It's time to get up. It's time to get up in the morning."

In faith we celebrate that the very ones we remember today, though they have died, rise to the new day in God's kingdom.

Closer to home, our day is not done. It's time for us to wake up. So much has yet to be done!