

Memorial Day Deacon George Collins

The memory of love is what Memorial Day is all about. The kind of love that is suffering and at the same time joy. I come before you this morning in sorrow and also in great joy.

I do not intend to justify war but to justify those who offered their service, their lives for the greater good, their love of country and their fellow countrymen and women.

The wounds of their sacrifice never heal. Their wounds go underground into their souls. The true nature of their loving sacrifices hidden from our view so it is conveniently neglected by us as the history of yesterday.

Memorial Day is to remember the life stories of those who sacrificed their life for a greater principle. It is not a celebration; the fourth of July is a celebration. Lately, it seems, we have become callous and indifferent to the Memorial Day significance, through commercialism, twisted politics and an ignorance of our history. Memorial Day is not just about the dead; it is also about the living veterans, who do not forget their comrades with whom they shared so much.

The Veterans are a fascinating company of men and women who devoted their lives and their health to their country and the freedom it stands for. They come from every walk of life, every race and religion. They are a generous people. These heroes of our country represent the pillars of human dignity that has transformed the world by their generosity. To know how they fought in sorrow and despair; how they thrived in the glory of their achievements is to inspire patriotism and support of human dignity. Their exemplary deeds have enriched and influenced the lives of all citizens.

It is a pity that in recent years this valor has sunk to an all time low. In part this is due to skepticism, commercialism and an

ignorance of history. All past history seems to be irrelevant, ridiculed or reinvented. Their actions must be judged with an acknowledgement of true history and not politics.

My sorrow this morning is because we have such short memories, or even no memory of what is sacred; the loss of generosity and the rejection of love.

Selfishness prevails! There is more to the sacred than the dead. There are those who are living dead. The permanently wounded whose soul, mind and heart were torn apart from their experience. Time can never heal these wounds. There are so many who never made a recovery, and live on the street or in institutions and are forgotten and neglected, or just shunted aside as misfits in a secular society which has forgotten its history.

Memorial Day is not for satisfying our greed with sales, or pleasures, or self-indulgent commercial ventures. It is a time for remembering....remembering.-... remembering. It is a time for prayers of thanksgiving, for compassion, consideration and recognition. It is a holy day of solemn gratitude. The highest qualities of a true love. How can we ever say thank them for their sacrifices; greater love has no man than to lay down his life for another.

It is the suffering love of our heroes that made this country great. It is the pride in our past that predicts the vision of our future. All this is symbolized by our flag. It represents the valor of those who gave so much to have it raised in glory and preserved in dignity. For flags and veterans are mentioned together in the same breath. The flag is to be judged with a knowledge of history and not politics. Equally, it may remind us of our present shortcomings; for today's shortcomings lead to the corrective visions for our tomorrow. Today, men and women still enlist and volunteer to maintain our country's dignity and visions through sacrifice and love of neighbor. To follow the cause of justice for all.

Have you ever visited Arlington National Cemetery? It is a great lesson in history. A very solemn and sobering experience, especially at the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The dignity, respect and solemnity that exists is overpowering. One can not help but think, "I am here because they are there!" How can we not honor them? They are the ones who unite us, not politically but in humanity and justice. Today we offer our appreciation and prayers for those heroes that God has provided to us in the past and those new heroes who God now calls forth under the stars and stripes with a great dignity.

Memorial Day is also to remember the sacrifice, tears and hardships of their families who stay behind. They wait in trepidation, agonizing silence and fear. In their love they find a mutual support. They also need our prayers. They are the unsung notes of history.

When I see our flag, I can not help but personalize the history of my own family; and it brings me great joy. I see in the stars, not states, but names. Every star bears the name of a family member or a very close friend who served or died heroically. These are the stars on my flag. Your stories and loved ones are the stars on your flag. Your story and my story are the history of our flag. The stripes, laying side by side are the families standing shoulder to shoulder, supporting one another and their loved ones. Shoulder to shoulder, united with neighbor and united with the stars form a common cause for justice.

The flag is our history, the flag is our legacy. The flag is who we are. The flag is who our heroes are and it helps us to remember. The cynic can never understand this for they know no history. They do not understand valor and have no love for what has been given to them. They have only a white flag to wave. Today I ask you to remember, remember, remember your history and be grateful. Memorialize their contribution to love their neighbor by honoring a veteran; by a visit to a veterans cemetery you will gain a reality of your history.

As Yahweh told Moses to remove his shoes for he stood on holy ground, so too must we remember to remove our sanctimonious attitudes for we also stand on hallowed land made so by our heroes. God bless our heroes, God bless America.