

MEMORIAL DAY REMEMBRANCES

Memorial Day unofficially opens the summer season of the year, just as Labor Day closes it out on the other end of summer. Memorial Day is a time for family gatherings, for remembering and especially for telling stories. I am going to ask you all to spend some time telling your family stories over this weekend. It is of real importance. Telling our family stories roots us in our history, it hands on the family reality in a way that our DNA never can, and it serves to remind us from where we have come and what we have hoped. We need such reminders.

I lost a cousin in the Marines in 1968. He was my age. He was 21 when he died. It happened on the very same weekend my older brother was getting married up in New England. His mom and dad were there as part of our family celebration. They wouldn't come to know for some time. Communication was not so instantaneous in those days fifty years ago. But his parents mentioned at the reception after the wedding that they sensed something was amiss. They never really recovered from his loss. He had wanted to go. He put off going for two years because they asked him to do so. But he still wanted to be a Marine. He knew he wanted to serve. In some unknown way he also knew that no matter how things unfolded this was what he wanted to do with his life. I never knew but he talked with his parents before he left. They had prayed a lot for him. He had prayed a lot too. But he also knew that this was his task, his role, his responsibility. It was his life. No one took it from him. He gave it. He gave it freely. It makes me cry sometimes. Being the same age he would be 70 this year too. He left no wife. No children. Nor will I. But I have had my 70 years and have touched lives and, in turn, been touched by the love of others. He had fewer years but he knew what he was about just as much as I did.

Do you remember the musical *Les Miserables*? There is a song towards the end after the students have been killed on the barricades, betrayed by an infiltrator much like Our Lord was. The words are these:

There's a grief that can't be spoken,
There's a pain goes on and on.
Empty chairs at empty tables,
Now my friends are dead and gone.

Here they talked of revolution,
Here it was they lit the flame,
Here they sang about tomorrow
and tomorrow never came.

From the table in the corner,
They could see a world reborn,
And they rose with voices ringing,
And I can hear them now

The very words that they have sung
Became their last communion
On this lonely barricade, at dawn.

Oh my friends, my friends forgive me
That I live and you are gone

There's a grief that can't be spoken,
There's a pain goes on and on.
Empty chairs at empty tables,
Now my friends are dead and gone.

And so it is with this Memorial Day. We all have our own empty chairs at empty tables that we remember with deep love and reverence. But let us who gather here not forget that we are believers in Jesus Christ who also served in such a way that He made the gift of his very life so that we might be free, not just in this country and this time but in all of eternity. We have just celebrated his Ascension into heaven. It came forty days after his triumphal resurrection from the dead. I ask you to go back though for a few moments to some Scripture passages that you know. Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on that Holy Thursday night? How he is sweating blood? How he asks his Father to take the cup away from him so that he does not have to drink it? Do you remember how that prayer ends? “But if you cannot take it away, thy will be done?” That was his prayer in that moment. In the gospel for today we hear Jesus again praying to his Father, this time with his disciples within earshot, at the Last Supper. And he asks for God to glorify Him, the Only Begotten Son.

Is that prayer answered? Is the Gethsemane prayer answered? Has Jesus been glorified? Well, yes. He has been raised. He has ascended to His Father. Together they have breathed forth their Spirit into us to give us a life that will never end and a power that will set us free. But Jesus was not spared. And we are not spared either. We do have to learn how God the Father answers our prayers and when. For example, ask yourself: Is there more glory in God saving Jesus from being crucified or in Jesus' courageously facing death for us because of his great love and then being raised from that death and taken into the kingdom of heaven? I think you know the answer to that question. So. That prayer is answered but not in the way it was prayed. And God does that with his own Son. God does that for us too. Always God does what is best for us even when we do not always see—or agree.

Prayer doesn't always get us what we want. So, why does Jesus pray so much given the fact that he was God's own Son? Jesus prayed late into the night. He prayed early in the morning. He took himself away from everybody else sometimes to pray. He prayed right in their midst so much that they asked him to teach them how to pray and he did. So why does he pray so much? Let me rephrase the question in a way that is more readily understandable. Why is it so important, necessary, helpful and beneficial to spend so much time with those we love? Our family and friends? Isn't it just obviously a good thing? Well is not prayer simply the same, spending time with the One we love? Jesus prays in faith. He knows that his horrendous death on Calvary will look like total defeat and failure for all that is good and true. But that will not actually be the case. It is only the appearance. The reality is totally different. We must decide if we are to live in the world of how things appear or in the world of faith and love which sees truly. My friends, you know, we share in that glory. It is as much ours as it is Christ's. And isn't that what he prayed also?

Let us not forget those we have loved, those who served, those who suffered, those who loved and those who believed. Let us commend them all to the Father's care this Memorial Day weekend. And let us celebrate in this Eucharist the victory our Christ has won for us—life forever in his Father's kingdom.