

Memorial Day Homily
May 25, 2020
Readings: Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33

For years, I saw the painting of a toddler on our staircase landing between the sets of stairs, midway up to the second floor. It was clearly an old painting of a relative and sadly, I was not curious enough to ask much about it until sometime later.

As it turns out it was my mother's Godfather, who lost his life in World War II.... My Godparents were his siblings. He died in World War II, stationed in the Army in the Philippines. He was a prisoner of War after the Bataan Death March. Towards the end of the war they took a boat load back to Japan and the ship was torpedoed. He was put on a Japanese ship in the hope that the Japanese, to be used as a bargaining chip. He survived the initial blast, a Japanese sailor undid the hatch, so that they could escape. But he never made it to shore; his body was never recovered.

We heard in our first reading from Acts of the Apostles the response of some of the disciples when asked about the Holy Spirit. "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." The farther away we become removed from history, the more likely we are to forget. Of course, we could add several wars after WWII and there will be more to come in future generations. This is one reason why national holidays such as Memorial Day are so important.

Charles Finnegan was one of 291,557 combat deaths in World War II. His brother, my own Godfather, was also a soldier, and he liberated one of the concentration camps in Europe and frankly he had PTSD long before they called it as such. That family paid a heavy price for freedom.

On Memorial Day, their memories live in our hearts. We honor those patriots who gave "the last full measure of devotion" -to use Abraham Lincoln's words - and died defending our freedom and union.

Vietnam was the first war that many people “watched” on television, and those images are very much a part of my childhood, watching the 5:30 pm news. It is a very different for those who experience it in reality. I came to realize that there are some very good reasons why soldiers do not desire to speak about their time in war.

They are men and women who have sacrificed that precious gift of life in order to defend our liberty and the inalienable rights of all to freedom, justice and peace. Nothing will ever take away the pain caused by their loss, but we must give thanks for their faithful service and pray that they enjoy everlasting life in the presence of God.

We also reverence the service of the men and women in uniform and their families today. We recall the words in today’s Gospel: “But I am not alone, because the father is with me.” Nor are our lost loved ones alone. The memories of those whom we honor today urge us to work for a just and lasting peace, a prelude to that eternal peace for which we all long.

FOR OUR ARMED FORCES

O God, I beg Thee, watch over those exposed to the dangers of a soldier's, sailor's, or airman's life. Give them such strong faith that no human respect may ever lead them to deny it or fear to practice it. Strengthen them by Thy grace against the influence of bad examples so that, being preserved from vice and by serving Thee faithfully, they may be ready to meet death, if it should come to them on land, at sea, or in the air.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, inspire them with sorrow for sin and grant them pardon. Mary, Immaculate Mother of God, protect them. Amen.