

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Very Reverend Glenn Jones

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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Rather an even more poignant and solemn Memorial Day than usual this year, for a few days after the observance of it, we come to the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the invasion of the Normandy beaches by the Allies on June 6, 1944.

One might glimpse the horror of that and other battles in video productions such as “Saving Private Ryan” and “Band of Brothers,” but no video can possibly produce the feelings of the sights, smells, and sounds ... of all-out battles. We who have been spared such experiences should be ever grateful to those who have not been so fortunate, as well as to those who continue to walk post ... to stand upon the wall to protect our nation and our way of life.

Of Allied casualties at Normandy were about 2,500 Americans killed and 5,000 wounded; for the whole of WWII, around 405,000. And yet even that number pales against the tolls of other battles and other wars—for the U.S., the [Civil War](#) most especially—the most deadly battle having been Gettysburg, where there were over 51,000 casualties, 7,000 of those killed in action. In all of the Civil War, estimates of deaths range from 620,000 to 750,000 and even higher—something to remember during debates about “reparations.” And despite what we may *now* think of their motivations and reasons for going to war, the vast majority fought in defense of what they thought was right, knowing the possibility of making the ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus tells us, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)—something that He Himself would endure not only *for* us, but as an example: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do...” (John 14:12) This is the very essence of sacrifice – a willingness to give everything, even one’s own life, for the sake of others. Our fallen exemplify such sacrificial love, echoing the ultimate sacrifice made by Jesus on the cross for the redemption of humanity.

But for many, Memorial Day is a day of grief and mourning as they remember loved ones who have made that ultimate sacrifice. We urge them to remember Jesus: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,” (Matthew 5:4), as well as: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4) So, though we grieve the loss of our fallen, we find comfort in knowing that they are—and hopefully will always be—remembered, honored, and cherished. We Christians also find solace in the belief in the resurrection, hoping that one day we may be reunited with loved ones in the hereafter.

But while we remember our military on Memorial Day, we must also never forget those who died in our service in police and firefighting forces, as well as other first responders such as EMTs and others who have died in our service. As summer comes, one might hail the service of wildfire fighters, who brave death if things go awry and unexpectedly. Or linemen (one of

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the [most dangerous of jobs](#)) who brave ice and snow, hurricanes and hail, and electrocution by working in such conditions to ensure the shortest electrical outages possible—critical for heat, water, security, hospitals, traffic control, etc. (approximately 42 of 100,000 linemen die on the job every year). Or oil derrick and platform operators providing energy on which we depend (whether one is a climate change activist or not). A good movie to watch to get an inkling of the dangers of such is “Deepwater Horizon”; forces held under control by “rigs” are a dragon tenuously harnessed.

(Speaking of climate change, as an aside, it’s informative to look at [charts](#) of CO2 emissions by country, region and year. While the U.S. and Europe have managed small decreases, those are eclipsed by the increases in India and especially China).

So we honor those this weekend who have made the ultimate sacrifice—the military especially, but all who have lived and worked that most noble of vocations: that of service to their fellow Man. Jesus tells us to “love your neighbor as yourself,” but these, in the offering and giving of their lives, have often exceeded even that ideal—having, as Jesus had done, loved their neighbor even above their own well-being.

One will only find a very limited happiness (“pleasure” is a better word) in seeking the material good of self; however, the joy of being of service does not only benefit oneself, but many others as well—even to their very survival in the most extreme cases such as feeding the starving, protecting the vulnerable, saving the sick and the injured. Are such selfless persons not those whom we honor most? We might admire the rich, the beautiful, the powerful... but, in the end, we all stand before God who asks: “How did you serve your neighbor ... my children ... with what I gave you—your intelligence, your talent, your own gifts.” He is richest who holds the least back, placing his treasure “where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” (Matthew 6:20) For death is a moth ... a thief ... which consumes all.

I often think of the [end of “Schindler’s List,”](#) in which Oskar Schindler, even though having saved over a thousand Jews from being murdered by the Nazi regime, weeps at having held back even as little as he had: “I could have gotten more. I didn’t do enough!” So we ponder: At what faults or deficiencies of our own will WE weep over when we stand before God, or even before the merciless court of human remembrance? At what will WE cry: “I didn’t do enough!”?

But the more we give of ourselves, the less we need be concerned. For God is love, and the more love we give, the more we share in the very essence of God, and the more we are truly His beloved children.

“All other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.” – Mahatma Gandhi