

**A DAY TO REMEMBER**

Seven score and three years ago this November, President Abraham Lincoln visited the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the purpose of dedicating the Gettysburg battlefield as a cemetery. He saw it as an opportunity to honor those who had given their lives on that hallowed ground in order to preserve the nation. The President underestimated the weight of his brief but powerful words, however, when he stated in his address that the “world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.”

President Lincoln was referring, of course, to those who were willing to die in order for the nation to live. It is a noble deed, the memory of which deserves to be recalled with dignity and respect. Visiting Gettysburg, one gets a sense of the sacred. One encounters more than what meets the eye there. It is an intangible energy that touches one’s very soul.

We have another such place in Pennsylvania, one that is within our diocesan boundaries. It is called Shanksville. Five years ago, the passengers of United Flight 93 were entombed into our soil, as the airliner plummeted from the air. I remember that September 11 very well. Guests had just left my Residence when the television abounded with news of New York City being attacked; and, then, Washington, D.C. What puzzled me was why US 219 was being closed and how was Johnstown involved. Now, we know.

That field in Shanksville has become another cemetery and another place where we remember those who gave their lives for the nation. It is in our sky that the fight against those who would terrorize and randomly kill our citizens began. Those individuals that decided to make a difference were ordinary persons like ourselves. They had homes and they had families. But, they also had faith, courage, and a sense of the common good. We must never forget what they did here.

Some do great deeds because they are forced to do so. Others do them because they so choose. Still others are compelled to act by a sense of their own destiny. For them, there is no choice. It is the thing to do. This latter was the case at what we now know as Shanksville. Those who gave their lives there give us hope in the human spirit. Remembering what happened five years ago, we celebrate their memory, and believe that their action has given others and us the strength to be better people.

I cannot help but make a parallel with the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross. He set the example of giving his life for the life of many. As we know, He was not altogether keen about it. But, it was his destiny. There was no choice; that is what He was supposed to do. He asked us to remember what He did. And, we do, as we celebrate the Sacred Liturgy, believing that there is a better future in store for us because of what He chose to do.

The words of President Abraham Lincoln ring so true during these days, as do those of Marty Haugen’s hymn. We remember. We celebrate. We believe. Let us never forget what they did here.