

FOR THE GOOD OF THE HOUSEHOLD

May 30, 2005

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REMEMBERING

What do you remember when you walk through a cemetery and the names of those whom you have known appear before you on their tombstones? When I walk through the cemetery for my hometown, I remember what those buried there looked like. But, my thoughts are captivated more by what they were like in their actions. Memorial Day is exactly what the name implies, a day that brings others to our memory.

I like the fact that this holiday is celebrated at this time of the year when we witness spring and summer, the seasons of freshness and new life. Our lives have often been refreshed due to the relationship that we have had with those who have gone before us. I wish that the Church would “christen” some of our current civil holidays, as it did in the past. Memorial Day should be one of them, replaced by All Souls Day that now comes on the threshold of winter and nature’s dying.

In particular, on Memorial Day we remember the sacrifices of those who fought in our wars. Regardless of how one feels about the current war, we do need to remember and be grateful to the sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, who have given up their lives. I pray that the land, into which they have poured their blood, will soon arise refreshed with new life. A recruit just out of basic training and visiting The Wall That Heals in Altoona a week ago is quoted as saying, “I joined the Army because I wanted to die for something, not from something.”

Wars are not popular, nor should they be. It would appear that a war without a physical objective can be especially unpopular. Those are the most difficult, misunderstood, and unaccepted wars. Author Mark Helprin was quoted in The Wall Street Journal as saying: “God help the army that must fight for an idea rather than an objective.”

Of course, the question can be asked: “Should anyone dedicate his or her life to and sacrifice for an idea?” By “idea” I do not mean someone’s particular fancy. Ideas (as in “beliefs” and “principles”) are what have shaped our society and world. And, even though, most of those buried in our cemeteries did not fight in wars, many of them did live out and sacrifice for beliefs and principles. We are what we are because of them.

Death is intended to be the forerunner of life. That is the way that it was with Jesus. And, that is the way that it is to be with you and me who follow him. As it is with all rites of passage, dying has value when accompanied by meaning.

Did you ever stop to think what those seeing your name on a tombstone will be reminded of, years from now? May they remember more than just your appearance.

As for me, I have stated on a number of occasions what I would like to have written on my tombstone. However, our diocesan bishops are entombed in the crypt of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, where there are no inscriptions. But, if there were, I would hope that someone might think to write: "He worked to make of us one."

Regardless, as long as that idea is inscribed in the hearts and minds of some, perhaps, it will be recalled now and then. And, because of that, the idea might take root and grow.