

November 12, 2020

Yesterday we invited Veterans to attend Mass together at 11 AM and we had planned a box lunch for them to take home but I cancelled that as I was wary of virus transmission if they gathered around the pick-up site so, I told them as I told the First Communion kids to have lunch on me.

I encouraged them go out and buy their lunch from wherever they wanted and send me the bill, to seriously make of their lunch a sacramental meal in memory of those who did not get thanked, all those legions of men and women down through the ages that didn't come home.

For many Veterans Days I have been in Paris or Edinburgh and the celebration there is a good week-long and while it is a celebration, it has a somberness and simplicity that we just don't do in our country.

One reason being, of course, is that the wars that created the veterans were rarely fought on our land, our soil in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that gives us the veterans that we are privileged to thank.

We do not have the tangible landmarks integrated into daily life that stand as witnesses to terrible suffering and human anguish and death that a city like Paris does, Edinburgh not so much, but Edinburgh right in the center of the city has a park filled with cenotaphs and memorials to the deaths of citizens and soldiers in far- away places, always with names, never anonymous except the unknowns, but they are identified explicitly as unknown not unhonored as in our own country..

Outside of the cities, especially, in France, you see the graves of countless Americans as it was national policy not to bring bodies home during WWI & WWII for many reasons, good reasons, most of which had to do with wealthy people having the funds to pay for repatriation which lead to all kinds of criminal fraud.

These American military cemeteries, as all cemeteries, hold, I believe, in sacred mystery the unfinished lives, the unrequited love, the unrealized dreams, the pain of that given day and time when that life on this earth ended and they hold a mystery about the Holy Spirit that the bodies there were temples of.

Cemeteries are important places, they give us a perspective that other places do not, probably, that is why cemeteries are becoming efficient and functional, we like other people to confirm our already set perspectives and we like to stay in familiar territories, cemeteries hold too much that is unknown and too much that we cannot control.

Cemeteries until rather recently were gathering places for the living and the dead, picnics were common, not in any macabre sort of way, but eating in the cemetery gave an intentional presence, a sacramental presence to the love and to the grief.

The very act of eating was in reality a symbol of the hunger we experienced at the loss of one we loved, a hunger for love and contact which would be a good model for our Sunday Mass experience going forward but that is for another day.

The hunger became the sacramental that allowed the mystery into our presence and while I have never been privileged to be the father of a child carried in the womb of a mother, I can only imagine the sacramentality that pregnancy can bring to the human experience, the “not seeing yet knowing.”

Tombs and wombs have a lot more in common that we typically imagine.

Some may accuse me of romanticizing too much, I hope not, although I know that life is cruel and unfair to many and deaths and pregnancies and sacramentalities are signs of contradiction for too many.

You will be receiving a letter soon inviting you to Christmas Mass and a parish Christmas Carol parking lot event on December 20, in the afternoon.

Both invitations are for reservations that need to be confirmed because we still need to know who is present and control the capacity of the facilities and as of today, there is reason to doubt that we will not be able to proceed as we are planning but do not lose heart, do not lose heart.

So, this Christmas is more than likely going to be very, very different. It already is for the 250,000 and still counting families that have lost loved ones to the Coronavirus.

We will be separated from loved ones, many of us will be alone and our Christmas Traditions will not be observed and we will probably, many of us, eat alone, so if you are at all up to it, begin preparing by setting aside some time, I call it prayer time, to decide to make of all of that, all the losses, a sacramental experience.

Use candles and use flowers if you can. Put up your tree as light in the darkness, set up your manger, prepare at least some special food, and toast the darkness as the Mystery that is beyond all mystery and the mystery from which we all come and to which we all return.