

Remembering our Deceased Loved Ones

Homily for Monday, the Seventh Week of Easter on Memorial Day 2020

Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! Every year we have the custom of an outdoor mass here in Yakima at Calvary Cemetery to commemorate Memorial Day. Memorial Day, as we know, is a time where we remember our



veterans, those who died protecting our freedom. In a previous year, I mentioned my grandmother's nephew, Herman, who was like an older brother to my mom because he lived with my grandparents after the Second World War. He was part of the second wave of D-Day forces landing several days after the initial attack. He worked as a road builder in the army rapidly cutting paths as Allied troops fought up Brittany. He was part of the Paris liberation. We want to honor and remember all of our veterans and all who have served our country and its freedom in any way.

Yet this is an unusual Memorial Day because those who are may be most present in our minds and hearts are the recently deceased due to COVID-19. One of our Yakima pastors conducted a service for a dying parishioner with medical personnel from Virginia Mason Memorial holding an iPad. The priest was present praying with the parishioner while family members looked on at home through their various pads and hand-held devices. Another pastor buried a mother and son while the father remains in ICU right now. That same pastor has another COVID-19 funeral coming up this week.

So even as we keep the custom of remembering those who have died in defense of our freedoms, this Mass might be the first time we can begin to grieve the current losses as well. We grieve our friends and family who have died due to COVID-19. We remember our deceased loved ones here and in Mexico. With the border closed, we are not able to go to be with our families. We grieve the fact that due to the COVID-19 virus we cannot gather together and grieve as a single family of faith. We are limited to just a few people at a graveside. I hope that this Facebook Mass provides at least a small pathway for us to grieve the loss of our loved ones.

Perhaps the words of Jesus in our Gospel today can help us with our grief: "...I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world."

These words of Jesus come from deep in the Gospel of John. He speaks these words to his disciples as a final testament just before he faces his trial and crucifixion. More than one scripture scholar has suggested that he speaks these words with an eye to all the disciples of every age. He does so in order that each of us might find our peace in Jesus.

Yesterday we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. We did so, looking to Jesus as the sign and guide that where he goes we might follow. Today he reminds us that even in the face of his own death on the cross, he wants us to remember that his greatest gift to us in the face of our death, our loss and our sorrow is his peace. My prayer for each of you is that whatever your loss, your sorrow or your grief, that you may find your lasting and eternal peace in Jesus. Peace be with you.

Art: "Christ Walking on the Waters," Julius Sergius von Klever c. 1880s / Public domain