

Sermon: May 30, 2010 (Memorial Day weekend)

“Called to serve”

In life ... all we have is our HUMANITY.

Strong, at times ... often frail ... wrinkled on occasion ... even majestic.

Each of our journeys ... it's unique ... no other like it.

Unfortunately ... we spend a lot of time trying to meet the expectations of others ... we often try to be like someone else. There are times when we become infatuated with ourselves ... at other times ----- we may doubt who we are and get down on ourselves.

Life ----- it's a “human casserole” ... lots of flavors and ingredients.

I'm sure the Memorial Day holiday is different for each of us. When I was a kid ... Memorial Day was the beginning of the little league season. Here ... in Orland ... the season begins in March or April ... games are played in cold mist and wind ... and then the season is over as soon as the good weather gets here ... so all the all-stars and traveling teams can begin their seasons!@!! Oh, well. We would march downtown in our uniforms and end up at the local cemetery. We said the “Pledge of Allegiance” ... played “Taps” ... a few people cried ... I wasn't sure exactly “why?” ...

I'm not a veteran ... wish I was.

I remember sitting in German class in high school ... when the announcement came over the PA ----- that the older brother of one of our classmates had been killed in Vietnam.

I remember sitting in the basement of my fraternity house in 1968. There was a draft lottery ... and we all listened ---- hoping our number wouldn't be called. Instead of hoping my number would be called so I could serve ... I didn't want it to be me. I've always felt guilty about feeling this way ... since a year later ... one of my fraternity brothers – whose number was called – was killed in action.

On Friday night ... it felt a little bit like “church.” The occasion was small, humble, and unpretentious. Jude, Q, and I went to the Civic Center to participate in the dedication of the “Quilt of tears” ----- honoring the memory of the Vietnam vets who died because of their exposure to Agent Orange during the war.

When the head of the Veteran's Commission asked me to do the blessing ... I asked her ----- “Why me??? ...

I'm not even a veteran.”

Well, Don ----- our previous chaplain died ... Pastor Ledogar from Christ Lutheran is busy ... so, it's you!!

After all these years ... it's good to be kept humble.

The night was quietly inspiring ----- no pomp, no accolades, no dignitaries ... just squares on a quilt ... hand-made by family members who love and miss those who have left us.

We looked at the words.

We looked at the faces.

We talked to and met the Vietnam vets in the room and their families.

Vietnam vets are getting older now most of them in their '60's.

I thought about that night in the frat-house ... not wanting to go. I thought about how it took 20 years after the war ended ... for the Vietnam vets to get their parade through downtown Chicago.

I went to the parade with a Vietnam vet from our church ... who since has died because of his exposure to Agent Orange. The Grand Marshall of the parade carried two crutches ... had no legs.

I'm thinking ...

THERE ARE NO STRANGERS HERE!!

World War I ... World War II ... Korea ... Vietnam ... the Persian Gulf

Iraq ... Afghanistan

I can say this to you ----- Veterans, service men and women ... IF NOT FOR YOUR SERVICE ... all those names on our insert ... the names in our hearts ... yes, if not for your service and sacrifice:

we would not be here today.

We live in an imperfect world.
We live in an imperfect country.

We are still at war and our country is very much divided.

We can disagree ... we can debate and vote and argue ----- **but we do not have to be divided.**

Thursday night at our worship ... **THE BIKERS WERE BACK** ... for our 2nd bike blessing.

Hey, when you think of All Saints ... of course, motorcycles come to mind right away!@!!

87 bikes!! ... and everyone of the riders and passengers joined us for worship.

And when I issued to the invitation to come forward and share in the Lord's Supper ...

they all came up to share the gifts!!

Same thing with the "Catholic funeral mass" I had here yesterday. This was not an All Saints funeral crowd.

Ed ... the husband of the gracious lady who died ... kind-of asked me at the visitation:

"Father Don" ... (I love the title!!) ... "are we going to have a FULL MASS tomorrow??"

Ed ... I'm sure as heck not going to give you a half-mass!!

We invited the folks to come forward for the Lord's Supper ... and ----- **they all came.**

No strangers here.

Just --- all God's children!!

WE ALL HAVE UNIFORMS.

We have "callings."

We have "journeys."

We are all "called to serve."

Yes ... life can be a battle.

Life often takes a whole bunch of endurance.

When we come to the altar ... when we see "the uniform" ... we realize:

"Out there" we may be divided.

But "in here" ----- we are ONE!!

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