

Sermon: November 12, 2023
"Guilt, strong coffee, and honor"

It's always a deep privilege to recognize and honor our veterans. A couple weeks ago in Manteno ... playing bingo with the veterans living there. I remember having an Old Style with Ron Carr's 101 year old dad ---- a proud veteran from World War II. You veterans here today. When you stand up and we applaud ... I get chills. I was at the Orland Park Civic Center yesterday for the annual Veterans Day service. I've known these folks for years. I see Ron --- a proud Vietnam veteran. "Ron ... you haven't been to church in a long time ... how come???" He smiles: "Well, Don ... when you first came here ... you were too young. Now ... you're too old!!@@!!" Oh, well ... can't win with him!

When I am in the presence of veterans and first responders ... something wells-up inside of me.
Gratitude for what these men and women stand for.

When I see a veteran and/or first responder ... I try always to say: "THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE."
These words make me realize ----- in our own way, we are all called to "serve."
Servers at a restaurant. The workers at Circle K. An aide in assisted living. Nurses, lawyers, pipe-fitters.
Working in a print shop, your small business. Stay at home dad or mom. Teachers. Grass-cutters.
Yes ----- our vets have served us, so we are free to serve others.

The other day I'm at Circle K. I fill my truck with gas ... buy something inside. I say to the cashier: "thank-you for your service." She responds: "I'm not a veteran. Oh, it's you ... that minister-guy down the street!!"

Do you ever have "survivor's guilt"?? That feeling ---- why am I still here? ... and he/she is not.
I often flash-back to my college years. The Vietnam War. The draft. Huddling in our fraternity house basement ... hoping our number wouldn't be called. A couple weeks later ... we get the word ----- one of our fraternity brothers ... his older brother was killed in action. Guilt. A bit of shame. A feeling and a moment I will never forget.

I often think of my buddy Jerry Arnold.
One Sunday I'm talking about veterans and the wars in which they served.
Jerry leaves church, as I am greeting people. He looks at me and points to his hat: Korean War Veteran.
I didn't mention the Korean War. (He never let me forget that!!)
Then he puts his hand on my shoulder:
"Don, you can quit apologizing for not being a veteran ... you make really good "military coffee."
To this day ... when I make church coffee ... I put in one big extra scoop:
"Jerry, the coffee may be strong ... and this one's for you!!"

We all have moments when we reflect on our life. Especially as we get older.
Looking back: our mistakes, our victories ... the path leading to today.
I kind-of hit me the other night ... as I share a funeral for a gentleman, who died at the at the age of 64.
Leaving behind his wife, 2 kids, 1 grandson.
As I look over a crowded funeral home full of people I don't know ...
I share some personal thoughts:

"I know we don't know each other ... but I don't believe in strangers. We are all bound together by the power and beauty of God's spirit and our shared human spirit. Your loved one ... my gosh, he is 10 years younger than me. I'm still here. Doesn't seem fair. He is out of time ... I have more time, I hope. In his silence, he is saying to me: don't take time for granted. Use your time to make a difference."

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Then there is the B-Man. Four years ago he became an angel. He was born in March, and died in November.

I feel "guilty" about that.

And yet ----- his spirit inspires us to move ahead with gratitude and grace. To finish what he could not. For sure ... he will never be forgotten.

I guess feeling "guilty" isn't all bad ... as long as our guilt doesn't paralyze us from moving forward.

Guilt can "call us" to face the future and be of "service" to those around us.

We have to use the freedom we have ... yes, the freedom so many have fought for, and even died for.

The gospel this morning is interesting.

Are you like Martha ... or Mary???

Martha is the worry-wart. Always fussin' to get things done and make everything perfect.

Mary ---- the free spirit.

Jesus comes for dinner. Martha is cookin' and cleaning ... while Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to what he has to say.

Martha is miffed: "Jesus, doesn't it bother you that Mary is making me do all the work."

I can see Jesus smile: "Martha, I am with you only for a little while. Mary is doing the right thing."

Every day ----- we are call to "do the right thing."

Sometimes it works.

Sometimes it doesn't.

We have our share of "alleluia" moments ... mixed with times of "guilt" ... when we see someone we love suffer, or we make a bad decision.

Today we honor a whole bunch of men and women, who have sacrificed ... so we may share this incredible gift of freedom.

All we can do is give each day the very best we have!!

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