

Column053021

Companions on the Journey

May 30, 2021

Dear Friends,

It is the Memorial Day weekend. This has become the traditional but unofficial opening of the Summer season. Its origin is at the end of the Civil War when a group of freed slaves and others totaling about ten thousand people, celebrated the freedom from slavery won on account of the many who gave their lives to protect the union and to liberate those subjugated in slavery.

It was not until 1971 (surprisingly to me) that Memorial Day was officially promulgated by the President as a federal (national) holiday. That means that Memorial is actually celebrating its 50th birthday this year. It was situated on the last Monday in May and it has often been characterized by local parades, the visitation of the graves and the decoration (Decoration Day is how it was known originally) of those graves. It was a day of reminiscence and relaxation and family sharing of food. There was always a quiet reverence to this day because it was observed to recall the lives of those who paid the ultimate price of their own lives in service to this country. As Jesus himself said, "There is not greater gift than to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus did that. Many others have done that, their lives tragically and traumatically cut Short.

I had a cousin named Paul McHenry who died in Viet Nam on the day of my brother Mike's wedding in 1968 although his death was not known for many days. He was a Marine and it was what he wanted to do with his life and what he wanted to be in life. He even sensed that his life would not be a long one by any human standard. He died at the age of 21. He would be 74 years old today. Fifty-three years of life not lived. No spouse. No children. No grandchildren. The same could be said of me. But I have had a life in those fifty-three years. Many actually called me Father. I have known what it means to love and to be loved. He did not have that experienced. He turned his life over to God as he served his country.

I think of him every Sunday when I read the names on my Prayer List. I salute his memory. When his mom and dad, brother and sisters learned of his death they were cast into depression and deep mourning. His parents never really recovered. His dad died a short six months later. His mom who was always the life of any party struggled to find her joy again. These sacrifices are real. They deserve to be remembered and the person honored. Our society has become almost casual, at times, about life—via shootings, accidents, overdoses, and abortions. Sometimes even cruel and heartless. But a person's death leaves a void. They deserve to be remembered. Thus Memorial Day.

Even Jesus sought to be remembered, to find a way to leave himself to us. He chose to become food—bread and wine—simple, nourishing, life-giving food. Perhaps this Memorial Day attendance at the 9AM Mass to pray for those whom we revere and remember would be an appropriate way to show our respect.

In the Peace of Christ,

Msgr. McHenry