

SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

Some would say that remembrance is a waste of time...just get on with enjoying the present and move on.

Remembering the sacrifice of those who gave their lives so that we may live however, has tremendous impact. When we do remember, we get a clearer picture of what caused, and causes, the events that lead to death and strife. To accomplish this, Christ calls us to remember Him.

By all reports, throughout the history of humanity, there appears to be a no more difficult place to live than on the battlefield. In the field of battle, conditions are less than ideal...at the mercy of the weather - snow, rain, sleet or scorching sun. The little sleep a soldier receives in battle, is not in a warm bed, but in a few blankets on the hardened ground.

Many jokes have been made about using rations in the place of ammunition, yet we can be assured throughout history, that the food eaten by soldiers in battle is sparse and of poor quality.

Perhaps the most difficult battlefield of all time was the battlefield of Western Europe during the Great War, the war we now refer to as World War I. In that war, men of all nations gathered to do battle. The trenches were dug for hundreds of miles through France, Belgium, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands.

In these battlefields, thousands of soldiers endured drizzling rain and constant shelling that reduced vast tracts of land into a sea of mud. In fact, millions of casualties during the First World War, occurred because of the hardships of the battlefield, and not actual conflict. But those who would ultimately win the day, were those who were willing to endure those hardships.

In II Timothy 3:12 the apostle Paul warns his young friend Timothy that anyone who wishes to live a godly life in Jesus Christ, will face persecution. Paul knew this too well, for as he wrote this final letter to his dear young friend, he was chained as a criminal to a Roman guard.

As the messenger carried this letter to Timothy in Ephesus, the blade of the executioner was sharpened, and perhaps as Timothy read these words of exhortation, Paul may have already departed this earthly life.

How many of the early Christians lost their lives for their faith! Even today, the United Nations tell us that 16 million Christians lose their lives annually.

Early in 1940, the war-hardened veterans of the Nazi armies poured into Paris. The iron columns of armour and the regiments of Teutonic manhood, goose-stepped their way through the streets of Paris, in all the glory of a conquering army. The average age of the soldiers was 21, and they were the most powerful fighting force in the world on that day.

But four years later, on the sixth of June 1944, as the allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, the armies of German soldiers they found in those first few days, were not the same. The average age now being 25, the majority of these soldiers had enjoyed four years of French wine and food, and many had girlfriends, mistresses and wives among the French population.

They were an army softened by lack of purpose and too much indulgence in civilian affairs, and for most of them, the attack that morning took them by surprise. Any good soldier knows that he has no place in civilian affairs when he is at war. The good soldier knows that he must focus on his purpose and his goal, or risk being caught off-guard when the enemy attacks.

When I was studying theology in Saskatchewan, we had a guest speaker come to one of our chapel services. This man had lived in an African country where outright persecution of Christians was commonplace. But as he shared his story, he shocked us when he told us that the people of his African church, spent time praying for North Americans, because for us, the temptation of worldliness is so much greater and so much more insipid than theirs.

For the persecuted church, the choice is clear-cut. It is the choice to **live** for Christ and follow His will into an unknown future, or to **abandon** Christ, opting instead to embrace the temporal things this world has to offer.

But for us, it is so much more difficult to avoid worldliness. Can worldliness be summed up in what we wear, how we speak, where we go, what we watch? Can we draw some sort of distinction between godliness and worldliness in a culture which tells us that everything is acceptable, and that encourages us to be Christians who behave in every way like the others around us?

Perhaps the greatest military disaster for Canadians, was the failed operation on the beaches of Dieppe on the 19th of August 1942. The majority of men who landed on the beach, were killed or captured in eight hours of fighting.

Captain John Foote, a chaplain with the Canadian army, spent the time coolly and calmly walking about, collecting the wounded, saving many lives by his gallant efforts, and inspiring those around him by his example.

At the end of this grueling time, he climbed from the landing craft that was to have taken him to safety, and deliberately walked into the German position in order to be taken prisoner. Why? ... so that he could be a help to those men who would be in captivity until the end of the war.

For his gallantry, he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award given to soldiers in the British Commonwealth. Today he serves to demonstrate what it means to serve with distinction.

A soldier who serves with distinction will be rewarded. Paul tells Timothy that it should be his desire to serve with distinction, so as to please his commanding officer, Jesus Christ.

At the end of his letter, Paul returns to a military theme. He states, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which Christ, the righteous judge, shall award to me, and not only to me, but to all those who love His appearing." (II Timothy 4:6-8) Paul identifies the fact that God will reward those who serve well.

But let me remind you with the words of Paul, that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against Principalities and Powers and Spiritual Wickedness in High Places.

As soldiers of the cross engaged in a continuing battle, let us prepare to endure hardship like good soldiers, recognizing that not all of the Christian life is leisure and pleasure. Let us avoid the entanglement of the world, remembering the example set by our Lord who surrendered His own life to win for us an eternal victory.

Be encouraged in the fact that the final battle is already won, and that in victory, our King waits for us and someday we will be with Him.

So, as we remember today, soldiers fallen in earthly conflict, and commemorate their brave sacrifice, let us also remember Jesus Christ, the victor of the cross, who has given to us His victory, and called us to be soldiers of the cross.

To that end, let each one of us, serve with purpose and distinction.

Onward, Christian soldier!!! AMEN