

Bishop's Letter for Memorial Day Observance 25 May 2017, Anno Domini (in the 241st year of our Declaration of Independence)



Bishop's Memorial Day Devotional Letter
Memorial Day 2017
Poppies of Flanders

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:25)

The second battle of Ypres, Belgium, in May of 1915 seems ages way in time, but it is not really. Many of our fathers were yet living during the time of that battle. Brave and principled men representing the Allied Powers stood up for the heritage of liberty and freedom which their Christian culture had bequeathed them. The principle that drove them to risk their all at the altar of freedom might be summarized in one simple term – LIBERTY! They cherished the value and dignity of human life as described in the American Declaration of Independence: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."* It was the embodiment of the value of human liberty that compelled them to the forefront of battle – to risk body and soul against shell and shard; sword and pestilence, and even deadly chemical agents, in the pursuit of the preservation of that Godly concept of Liberty for all mankind.

The poem, *In Flanders Fields*, well articulates the issues of sacrifice and compassion that moves in the heart of the patriotic soldier. Written by LTC John McCrae during the 2nd battle of Ypres, and the day after losing his best friend in battle, the poem is plaintive and melancholy in its description of the loss of heroic blood in battle. The day is described by others present that day as being precisely the kind of day described by McCrae. There was a gentle, westerly wind blowing the poppies that surrounded the crosses of white at Flanders on May 3, 1915.

In Flanders Fields

The World's Most Famous War Memorial Poem
By Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead: Short days ago,
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved: and now we lie
In Flanders fields!

Take up our quarrel with the foe
To you, from failing hands, we throw
The torch: be yours to hold it high
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Composed at the battlefield on 3 May 1915
during the second battle of Ypres, Belgium

This poem reveals the continuing force of nature in both flower and fowl. Nature continues on as always – even at such tremendous cost of battle in human resources:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

But it also reveals a spiritual power that supersedes the natural in the supernatural sacrifice of gallant soldiers for the freedom of their people. This is not natural, but Godly. The guns of war are oblivious to this powerful truth. The course of nature will continue unchanged into the distant future; but the supernatural, godly character of freedom-loving men and women who will arise to the challenge against Liberty may, indeed, change. The Fire of Liberty is a Light that demands fuel – the fuel of a continual flow of red-blood to preserve it.

When we think of Flanders, our imaginations run to Europe and her cultured fields and well-kept gardens; but that does not fully represent the Flanders of which I speak. In reality, Flanders Fields is every cemetery in America, England, France, and beyond in which the remains of a gallant soldier of his country lies in the repose of sleep awaiting the Reveille of God's Trumpet. In many unkempt graves, the soldier lies beneath weed and briar, or honeysuckle and daisy, unsung and unremembered by those whose freedoms were purchased at his sacrifice. It is sad that a nation is so little taught of her history that she would allow her heroes to go unremembered, but it is so today.

I remember so very well, as if yesterday, that Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Veterans Day were celebrated by parades and outpouring of praise for our soldiers who

fought for our country. I do not believe we missed a single Memorial Day or Veterans Day that we failed to observe with parades and ceremony during the five years following the Second World War. I was so very proud, as a toddler, to see my father march in each of those parades smartly outfitted in his uniform (which still fit him). But today, the occasion for these celebrations has become a matter of convenience and no more.

I, and many others in America, are blessed to live in small communities that continue to place a high premium on patriotic events and holidays. You can be sure that it will be these small communities who will first field the soldiers needed in the future defense of our freedoms.

I do not feel the need to remind the readers of this devotion that the Author of our Liberty is the Lord Jesus Christ. He died both to save our souls and to provide us Liberty. *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10)

There is, by the way, an answer to LTC McCrae's poem, *In Flanders Fields*. It was written in 1918 by Moina Michael:

We Shall Keep the Faith

By Moina Michael

Oh! You who sleep in Flanders fields,
Sleep sweet – to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders field

And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honor of our dead
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that you wrought
In Flanders field