

As Father, Son and Spirit Reveal Love, so Can You and I

Ted Pace, who's from Pittsburgh, served his country during World War II. When he was in his 80s, he decided to serve again.

He saw a problem. With World War II veterans dying in increasing numbers, he felt more needed to be done during their funerals to recognize their military service.

Though Congress mandated in 1999 that two active duty servicemen be available to participate in veterans' funerals, Mr. Pace wanted to do more. He established a full-fledged Honor Guard, recruiting from his post, as well as VFW Post 6664 a few miles away. Soon, 22 vets had signed on, veterans who served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, veterans eager to serve again.

This band of brothers went on to participate in more than 270 funerals a year, sometimes five days a week, sometimes twice daily. They've performed services in the mud and in pouring rain. They've performed during blizzards and subzero temperatures.

Ask any why they do it and you get the same reply: It is their great honor to serve. Their service is all the more remarkable in that most of these men are retirees, often in their 70s and even 80s.

Often recited by a chaplain at the tomb of a soldier is the soldier's prayer. It reads: **"It is the soldier who has given us all our freedoms. It's the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press. It's the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech. It's the soldier, not the campus organizer, who has given us the freedom to object. It's the soldier, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial. It's the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves under that flag and whose coffin is draped under that beautiful flag, who has given us the freedom to comfortably sit in our living rooms each evening with our loved ones."** And these are all gifts given by soldiers to people who have no idea who most of them are. Additionally, three shots are typically fired in the air by the honor guard, symbolizing duty, honor and love of country.

These men served their country, and the wars they fought have long since ended. But yet, to preserve freedom, women and men continue to serve.

Last weekend for most people, we took the time to enjoy a three-day weekend that was the unofficial start of summer. But we also celebrated a day set aside to honor the nation's war dead. We had a Mass as well on Monday, though attendance was just up slightly from a typical daily Mass, and then a cemetery service.

My hope is that you don't feel guilty about enjoying some down time, because by all means, I hope you were able to enjoy a well-deserved day off and sleep in, have a nice BBQ or find a hammock, and get more time like that ahead this summer. But my hope is that from those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and from those who serve our nation, we can learn something about sacrifice and love. Because these people put into practice what today, Trinity Sunday, is all about: revealing the love of God.

The problem with the Trinity is that it can be so hard to understand. Indeed, were it not for God acting on us, we would never have come to understand something like the Trinity. But think about how often we invoke the Triune God, often starting each prayer with the Sign of the Cross. Despite having the Trinity as a cornerstone of our faith, most of us are left at the shamrock – we know there is a Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but we can't really describe what that relationship

looks like. I think it is often easy for the Trinity to be seen as distant; something we will experience when we get to heaven. But I would make the case we experience that here and now, namely through trying to emulate the perfect love between Father, Son and Spirit.

Ted Pace and his brother soldiers turned out for soldiers of all ranks, because on the field, each person is seen as an equal who is serving their country and who deserves the same response of love when he or she has a need. Much like that, our God looks at us not by our rank if you will, but through the eyes of someone who calls us an equal. We are certainly not God, but, as the preacher Fr. Brian Davies asks, “what if God has found an equal to love? And what if that equal ends up treating us as His equal? Then, perhaps, we can finally speak of God being in love with us. If God loves another equal to himself, and if we are invited to share in that love, then God stands to us as more than just benevolent.” And that is what we see in how the Trinity has acted. Because of the Incarnation, the eternally beloved of the Father has become one of us in the Son – a man who was wounded for our iniquities and crushed for our sins, but someone who also calls us not servants but his friends, and someone who pours fourth on us the Spirit which unites Him and His Father. And because of that Spirit, who gives us gifts and virtues, and sanctifies us, we can grow in that love over the course of a lifetime.

Seeing how the Trinity reveals God’s love for us, the question we also have to ask is how do we reveal that love to one another? The challenge is to do as Jesus commands us in the Gospel, to make disciples of all the nations. You and I have a choice – we can look at the world and complain about it or be disengaged, or we can be like the Triune God who, much like in soldiers like Ted, is incredibly involved in the world present to it with a pure love. Saint Paul speaks of hope as that which does “not disappoint.” Hope is the virtue given to us by the Spirit where, having a hope for in heaven, we live out that hope by being active in the world and trying to make a difference to guide people to the Father, what Jesus told us to do before His ascension. If you want to convert the world and make disciples of the nations and really reach hearts, you don’t do it by banging on doors or leaving literature on windshields, you do it through both word and action, as our God has done in creating us, as He did through the Incarnation and suffering and death, and as He continues to do through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit.

Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical “God is love,” writes of how love is so much more than a sentiment, in that sentiments come and go. It is something that is life-long, and over the course of a lifetime we need to grow in a self-abandonment to God. We do that by remembering that love isn’t something imposed on us as a commandment; rather love is something that is a free gift of our Triune God, and that our God is, as Saint Augustine said, more present to me than I am to myself. Often times on our earthly journey, God can seem distant and hidden. In my priesthood, I have certainly had moments like this as we all do. We go through suffering and see loved ones suffer; we have moments where we try to help people only to see people we care about make bad decisions; we pray and our prayers go unanswered. But God is indeed closer than we can ever imagine; people like Ted prove that. Do we do the same? Do our souls thirst for God? On this Trinity Sunday, my hope is we can take a page from people like him, and from the many heroes who died to give us the freedom that we have. For indeed, the Trinity is much more than a shamrock, or some mechanical reference we recite at the start of prayer by making the Sign of the Cross. The Trinity is God’s love that has been revealed, and is continually revealed in a God who is so very close to us, and who knows us better than we know ourselves. May we never

forget that, and do all we can through the testament of our lives to make that love known to the world.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul

P.S. A big congratulations to our 8th Grade Class, who celebrates graduation this weekend. In their time at Saint Joe's, they have learned so much, most importantly how to follow Jesus and help people come to know who God is. Thank you to Mrs. Kelly Roche, our principal, and Mr. Terry Hale, 8th grade teacher, and to all of our amazing teachers for all they do for all of our students. Please keep the 8th graders in prayer as they begin this next chapter of their lives.