

Memorial Weekend

Ascension

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100 000! Today the only headline on the front page of the New York Times was a banner announcing that this Memorial Day weekend the Coronavirus death count in the United States will break 100,000. The rest of the front page, carried across three more full pages is a list of 1,000 names, commemorating the 100,000 who have died.

There is some good news thought too this weekend. But the number of daily deaths is coming down. In New York City , the epicenter of the epidemic here in the United States has dropped from 1,000 a day at its peak to 100 a day. We are hardly out of the woods but we have hopefully weathered the worst of it. So long as we our focus does not wander. Wandering is a metaphor for sin in Christianity. A metaphor for losing one's way. So long as our attention does not wander, so long as we do not lower our guard, the worst may be over.

But it is time to venture back out. Every state has begun to open up, carefully, prudently, but open up. Its fitting that this milestone is crossed over the Memorial Day weekend. And it is fitting that it happens on the feast of the Ascension. Let me flesh out my thinking here.

First Memorial Day is a holiday founded to remember those who sacrificed their lives, in the bloom of their youth, for the protection of our country. We, their elders and offspring, we owe them a debt that can only be repaid by remembering them and their sacrifice. 100,00 Americans have died in the last ten weeks from the coronavirus onslaught. More than died in our last three wars, Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East together. Few of them were young. Most of those that were died by putting themselves in harm's way, risking exposure through caring for one and a half million of us who have been infected. Most who died were in the twilight of their lives already. But they died alone, quarantined from family and friends, many at home, most in hospital surrounded by the pandemonium of intensive care units. All are casualties in a war not started by humans, but catalyzed and shaped by us, albeit originally unawares, but too often intensified through denial and neglect, our unwillingness to admit the demonic in our midst until it became unavoidable.

But now the worst may be behind us. If our communities, our country, our species can persevere in the fight. If we can collectively resist the temptation to wander. We are a country of individuals. Summoning individuals to all do the same thing is to pray for a daily miracle. But hopefully on the other side we will appreciate the miraculous that daily occurs, God's ongoing creative energy making something out of nothing, making somebodies of nobodies.

And so its also fitting that we cross this milestone on the feast of the Ascension as well. The Son of God, who did not deem his divinity something to cling to but emptied himself for our sake, not only to become one with us, but one of us, who identified with the lowest among us, suffered the afflictions visited upon the worst of us, and died as do we all, but who then was risen up again by the Father, to offering new life to all of us dead to sin, lost to wandering. Our savior today returns to the Creator, our common Father, from whence he came having completed what he came down to do.

We too are on the ascent. Partly through the sacrifice of those we remember this day, partly through our own perseverance to keep ourselves and others safe, partly through the unprecedented investment of our resources, partly through the dedication of those in the medical professions, our latest first responders, partly through the ingenuity of our scientists, but mostly through the grace of God, present throughout, holding us close when we could not hold one another, a sustaining divine presence, of which we are now more aware than ever.

Today Christ completes his incarnation, returning from whence he came. But he leaves promising to not leave us alone, but to send down the Paraclete, the Advocate, Greek and Latin titles with the same root: one called to be at our side, to work on our behalf, to plead our cause, as we join with the Father to complete his work, the creation of our world and the salvation of our souls.