

A Word from the Pastor

Dear Loving Saints,

On November 11th our nation will celebrate Veterans Day. I thought it would be appropriate to share the history of this holiday and to offer an example of heroism displayed by a chaplain during World War II.

Many people in the United States confuse Memorial Day with Veterans Day. Memorial Day is a holiday for remembering those who have lost their lives while serving in the Armed Forces. Veterans Day is a holiday for celebrating the service of all those who are serving or have served in the Armed Forces of the United States. Veterans Day was first instituted by President Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I. Initially it was known as Armistice Day to commemorate the armistice signed at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918. Despite the fact that the war did not officially end until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, most nations commemorate the ending of the War on November 11th each year. In the United States it became a federal holiday in 1938 with its name and purpose changing in 1954. With the designation as “Veterans Day”, the holiday came to represent a day of honoring all men and women who have served in the Armed Forces.

Many veterans have served without being placed in extreme danger. Others have been wounded or lost their lives either during wartime or subsequent to wartime injuries. As we pause on November 11th to say a prayer for those who are serving or have served in the military, let us also remember to thank our veterans for their willingness to serve. As I reflected on the number of veterans currently living in the U.S. (21,999,000), I thought about John 15:13. In this verse we find Jesus saying the following to his disciples: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus calls us to love one another so much so that we would be willing to sacrifice ourselves. While some might suggest that Jesus was making use of hyperbole, Christians understand the command to love without counting the cost.

Considering Jesus’ explanation of love, I want to share a story about a Navy chaplain who served during World War II. Reverend George S. Rentz was a Presbyterian minister who served as a chaplain in World War I and II. During the Battle of Makassar Strait in 1942, the USS Houston, on which Reverend Rentz was serving, was sunk by the Japanese. The following account is taken from an article entitled 12 Heroic U.S. Military Chaplains found on the internet: “Hanging onto an overcrowded piece of floating material, Rentz tried to relinquish his life jacket to a younger sailor, but no one wanted to take it. He ordered Seaman First Class Walter L. Beeson to take the

life jacket, then Rentz prayed and quietly abandoned the float and disappeared before the other men knew what he was doing. He was one year away from retirement. Rentz was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, and the frigate USS Rentz was named in his honor.”

On November 11th, let us not only remember our nation’s veterans and their willingness to be placed in harm’s way for their fellow countrymen, but let us also remember Jesus’ command to love others unconditionally. We may not have to give up our chance of survival for another, but in fact, we will not be able to avoid the plight of those in need constantly before us. May God enable us and strengthen us to remember that we are not our own.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Dennis