

Memorials help us promote a more God-filled culture

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JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS

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May is the month when we remember our mothers on Mother's Day (May 14) and when we remember our war dead on Memorial Day (May 31). For us Catholics, remembering and memorials are part of our faith. Our Eucharist is a memorial. So let's explore this word memorial a bit more!

In March I had the chance to tour Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial.

"Tour" is probably not a good word; "experience"

would be better. Those of you who also have done this will remember that the experience begins in the museum where there is the "gathering storm" display. It brings together the geopolitical forces - like Japan's need for rubber and oil - that led to the attack on December 7, 1941. A sense of doom and inevitability is created. Believe me, I heard the scriptures of Lent differently this year as Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem where the plots and hostilities against him created for him a gathering storm!

Further into the Pearl Harbor museum are eye-witness accounts of the actual attack, still photos, and some film shot during the attack with the "home movie" equipment that was just coming into use. The horribleness of the deaths of the more than 2,000 military and civilians causes silence to fall among the crowds viewing the display. It is not easy to see men abandoning ship into a flaming sea of oil or being entombed in sinking ships. For those of us who have not served in combat but only watched military action on TV, the human savagery of war becomes more present. Then after the museum we were transported the short distance into the harbor to the Arizona memorial. Respectful silence is requested and observed in this memorial over this sunken battleship where 1,177 crewmen are entombed; it is visible in the waters beneath the memorial. Poignantly, every so often a couple bubbles of oil from the sunken ship rise to the surface

even today, making the 1941 event even more present in real time. Then it is time for the last stop, the battleship Missouri. This ship was the site of the signing of the Japanese surrender in 1945; so being on the Missouri closes the Pearl Harbor experience by representing new possibilities of peace in the post World War II world.

Eucharist is our weekly memorial. "Do this in memory of me" (Cor 11:24). In the Eucharistic prayer - the long prayer the priest reads before and after the Consecration - there is mention of what we are remembering - the saving events of Christ's life and his death and resurrection. Our act of remembering each Sunday keeps Christ present in real time, present in our lives in Church and beyond. A parallel with the Pearl Harbor memorial is the emphasis on death, on the violent way Jesus died. Sacrifice of his life, like the sacrifice of their lives, is what ushers in the new age of peace. Looking toward the future is one purpose of memorials - creating possibility for that future, and creating determination in those who experience memorials to work toward a more God-filled and peaceful future. So our Eucharistic memorial does not just stop with the event of Jesus' death; it embraces the Risen Christ who goes before us through time to accomplish his Father's will that all be one and that "Thy kingdom come." And at the end of each Eucharist, therefore, we are blessed and "sent out" (at least those of us who don't slip out after communion!) to let the Risen Christ move in us to help with that.

May is a month of remembering. Remembering is an act that brings past realities into our present. Remembering sacrifice - of good mothers, of fallen military, of the crucified Jesus - calls us out of passivity and self-absorption and pettiness. And this is a very good thing!

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