



Lord of the nations, on this Memorial Day weekend, a time set aside to honor those who have died in the service of our great country, we thank you for giving us such patriotic citizens and a country that chooses to remember them. Grant us a long memory to recall those who gave the full measure of devotion to our country's peace and security. Help us remember the sacrifices of those who served faithfully until death in the protection of our freedom and in defense of our land. Also today we thank you for the saints who have gone before us in your service and have preserved for us the rich heritage of your gospel. We remember the blessings you gave to them and to us through them. Praise to you, O Savior, in your eternal glory. Amen.





# Remembering Loss

*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you (Ecclesiastes 1:2).*

My mother always called it Decoration Day. The high school band always led the way to the cemetery where a speech was made. The speech always ended with the words: "They have not died in vain!"

I always wondered why some people cried.

As a child, it was an exciting day. School was over. Summer was starting. Why would someone be sad?

Later, I learned. Some of my friends who watched the parade marching to the cemetery later marched to war. Some returned with broken bodies and some with broken minds.

Some now lie silently in that same cemetery. If they could hear, they would note the words, "They have not died in vain."

I have learned it is not a day for looking ahead to happy times. It's a time to look back and remember. It is rightly called Memorial Day.

It's all about remembering loss.

In the War between the States, America lost 650,000 of her sons. WWI cost America 116,708 deaths, including 43,000 who fell in the attacks by Spanish Flu.

Remembering a cluster of red poppies growing among the dead, a brigade surgeon penned the poem that begins: "In Flanders fields the poppies blow beneath the crosses, row on row."

The wearing of a poppy became the mark of those remembering those lost to war.

Much has changed since those days. More names have been added to the list of the lost.

Some are eager to move on to the future. "The past," they say, "is past." What good does it do to go back over what we cannot change? Why remember?

Those who have only a memory left of their loved ones might answer: "We cannot forget. We don't want others to forget."

At the 1945 dedication of the Fifth Marine Division Cemetery on Iwo Jima, Chaplain Gittelsohn said this: "We memorialize those who, having ceased living with us, now live within us."

God says: *"Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past."* Then he tells us how to do this: *"Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you."*

The younger do not understand. They must learn from the older. They need to be taught the true cause of war and the only source of peace.

True understanding comes only when they learn that God the Father lost his Son in the battle for our eternal life!

A cross became his memorial marker. But no body lies beneath it. That marker points to an empty grave. These are reminders of the life never-ending and the peace never-broken that he has won.

If remembering loss can lead us to remembering Christ, Memorial Day will have served us well.

For truly, it can be said of him, "He did not die in vain."

Written by Pastor Paul Ziemer



# Remembering Loss

God of grace and Lord of glory, we come before you on a Memorial Day remembering a loss. Some think of it as a nation's loss. But for those who miss a fallen son or daughter, a parent or a spouse, or a battle buddy, Memorial Day is personal. It's a reminder of painful personal loss. Small American flags flutter next to graves this weekend. Their markers may carry not only a name, but a military rank. Some of them read, "General" or "Admiral". But there are plenty with the label "Seaman" or "Private" and every rank in between. War is no respecter of rank. Nor does it care if loved ones shed tears over gravestones long after the war is over. War does not care. But you do, compassionate Father. Some flags hang next to graves marked, "Known but to God". Their loved ones have no place to bring flowers of remembrance. NO stone to weep over. Yet there is comfort in knowing that you know each one of them, Father. You marked the place where they fell. You watched the grave being dug or the casket slipping into the sea. You knew their name before their parents thought of it. You remember it still. You Loved them with a sacrificial love. You gave up your Son for them. His body once lay in a grave, too. You know the pain of loss. But in your loss, you gained for us the answer to loss. Those who lose this life trusting in you gain an everlasting life in glory. Your Son, Jesus, laid down his life that those who love him may overcome our nation's greatest enemy: death. Eternal Father, strong to save, bring your healing to our America. Stretch out your hand to shield our nation from harm. Bring peace to our shores and love to our hearts. Bring your strength to our weakness and your peace to our pain. When we feel loss, let us remember you. Amen.