

The Danville News
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"Lest We Forget."
Word Count: 750

Memorial Day is nice, but it's time to give it up. For one reason, we confuse it with Veteran's Day by honoring those men and women who chose to enter military service to their country. Yes, we hear the familiar platitudes about how we appreciate their service in defense of our country. Good for them. I, however, especially appreciate historical accuracy when the day's emphasis is on thanking those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, along with their gold star families, for fostering our nation's high principles. We decorate their graves in tribute. I just wish the cause for their deaths and service was as honorable as their service and death. But let's be frank. Some of our wars were indeed necessary and noble, well, as noble as war can be. Some weren't. Too many were more about opportunism than defending those principles. Excuse my insensitivity, but body bags must be justified somehow. Let's be honest.

Do you remember the names of the first two United States soldiers to die in Iraq? They both died on March 21, 2003. I bet their momma's do. Buddies too. The first was 2nd Lt. Therrel S. Childers, Harrison County, Mississippi. The son of a Navy Seabee, he wanted to be a Marine since he was five years old. He made it to thirty years old. He was shot in firefight to secure an oil field in southern Iraq. An oil field? The second was Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez, of Los Angeles, California. Los Angeles was his adopted home. He was an orphan who grew up on the streets of Guatemala City, Guatemala. Jose became an illegal alien at the age of fourteen, sneaking across the border. He ended in foster care, finally settling in with a family who loved him, themselves immigrants from Costa Rica. Shortly after high school he joined up with the Marines. He made it to twenty-two. Along with his love of soccer and chess, Gutierrez also enjoyed writing poetry. A poem he wrote in 2000, "Letter to God," was read at his funeral. "Thank you for permitting me to live another year, thank you for what I have, for the type of person I am, for my dreams that don't die," he wrote in Spanish. "May the firearms be silent and the teachings of love flourish." He was awarded U.S. citizenship, posthumously. Lest we forget.

The second reason for giving up Memorial Day is when we have children murdered in schools. Body bags in kiddie size. I really don't care anymore about the platitudes expressed in Memorial Park about what a great nation our soldiers have dedicated their years and lives to protect. We aren't that great. Will the day come when will we deserve Memorial Day?

If we really wish to be honest, the new reason for us to gather in the park on Memorial Day and listen to the anthem, hear the speeches, and feel noble about the recitation of the Gettysburg Address should be when Memorial Day is dedicated to fighting for those innocents slaughtered in schools, in synagogues, in mosques, in sanctuaries, in grocery stores. We need to dedicate this solemn day to more than a soldier's greater love, we need to dedicate it to eradicating from our national soul the sin of our hatreds, prides, fears, and prejudices. Or will we gather in Memorial Park, listen to the band, salute the flag, then just move on indifferently, unconcerned, unaltered? We've lost our American right to Memorial Day. We've proven we aren't the country those soldiers whose graves we decorate died for. I don't know about you, but ever since Sandy Hook, almost ten years ago (twenty mothers with empty arms, how many others since?), I have declared from the pulpit that I cannot offer up prayers and thoughts for the families of the victims. There comes a time when you can no longer remain hypocritical. And America,

the land I love, is the biggest hypocrite I know, besides myself. Golly gee, I'm so sorry your child was gunned down, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

I'm sick and tired of what too many of my brothers and sisters in Christ decry as the war on Christianity. I appeal to them. You want to identify the war on Christianity? This is it. When mothers end up with empty arms. Gun violence is war on Christianity. Racism is war on Christianity. Ignorance and want, poverty and cruelty, the murder of innocents, is war on Christianity.