

5.7.2017 Hacksaw Ridge (1 Peter 2:11; John 16:16)

The Medal of Honor is the highest and most prestigious personal military decoration that may be awarded to U.S. military service members who distinguished themselves by acts of valor. At the award ceremony a citation is read that describes the events which led a particular soldier to receive this highest honor. This is an excerpt from the Medal of Honor citation for Private First Class Desmond Doss: The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private First Class Desmond Thomas Doss, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry in action above and beyond the call of duty from April 29 – May 21, 1945. Private First Class Doss was a medic when the 1st Battalion assaulted a jagged ridge 400 feet high. As our troops gained the summit, a heavy concentration of artillery, mortar and machine gun fire crashed into them, inflicting approximately 75 casualties and driving the others back. Pfc. Doss refused to seek cover and remained in the fire-swept area with the many stricken, carrying all 75 casualties one-by-one to the edge of the ridge and there lowering them on a rope down the face of a cliff to friendly hands. On May 2, he exposed himself to heavy rifle and mortar fire in rescuing a wounded man 200 yards forward of the lines on the same ridge; and 2 days later he treated 4 men who had been cut down while assaulting a strongly defended cave, advancing through a shower of grenades to within eight yards of enemy forces, where he dressed his comrades' wounds before making 4 separate trips under fire to evacuate them to safety. On May 21, in a night attack on high ground, he remained in exposed territory while the rest of his company took cover, giving aid to the injured until he was himself seriously wounded in the legs by the explosion of a grenade. Rather than call another medic, he cared for his own injuries and waited 5 hours before men reached him and started carrying him to cover. As they evacuated, the men were caught in an enemy tank attack and Pfc. Doss, seeing a more critically wounded man nearby, crawled off the stretcher; and directed the men to give their first attention to the other man. Awaiting their return, he was again struck by a sniper bullet, this time suffering a compound fracture of one arm. With magnificent fortitude he bound a rifle stock to his shattered arm as a splint and then crawled 300 yards over rough terrain to the aid station. Through his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination in the face of desperately dangerous conditions, Pfc. Doss saved the lives of many soldiers. His name became a symbol throughout the 77th Infantry Division for outstanding gallantry

far above and beyond the call of duty.

Medal of Honor recipient Desmond Doss is one of the greatest war heroes in the history of America, but what truly sets him apart is the fact that he entered the battlefield without any way to defend himself and accomplished all those acts of bravery without ever firing a single bullet. You see, Desmond Doss was a conscientious objector, who decided to join the Army as a combat medic after the dreadful attack on Pearl Harbor, but refused to kill an enemy soldier or even carry a weapon into battle because of his Christian belief in the sanctity of life. In an interview he said, “I wanted to be like Christ, instead of taking life, saving life.”

Desmond Doss ended his military career as a recipient of the Medal of Honor, a hero among heroes, but he didn't start out that way. As you can imagine, his refusal to carry a gun didn't sit well with his fellow soldiers. They viewed him with hatred and saw him as a liability. Nobody believed a soldier without a weapon was worthwhile. They persecuted him, assigned him the most difficult duties, and his commanding officer tried to have him declared mentally unfit for the Army. When all that failed, they attempted to court martial him for refusing a direct order (the order to carry a gun), but they failed to find a way to toss him out, and he refused to leave. He believed his duty was to obey God and to serve his country, and for Desmond Doss it had to be in that order.

You don't have to look very far to realize that the world in which we live is a battlefield. The ravaging effects of Original Sin, and every subsequent personal sin, can be seen all around us. Humanity is wounded and dying, and as disciples of Jesus Christ, on the battlefield of this world we are called to be conscientious objectors and combat medics. Like Desmond Doss, we must recognize the truth that humanity is being attacked by the enemy and we are called by God to run into the battle and pull the wounded to safety, but as conscientious objectors (or in the words of our Epistle: as “*strangers and pilgrims*”) we must remember the world doesn't view us as worthwhile or even want us in this fight. Jesus assured us that the world will hate us. He said, “*And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake...*” (Matthew 10:22a). Jesus assured us that the world will persecute us. He said, “*The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*” (John 15:20). The world will try to toss us out of this fight, but we have Christ's own promise: “*he that endures to the end shall be saved*” (Matthew 10:22b).

This world is a battlefield and our culture is hostile to Christianity, but *“he that endures to the end shall be saved.”* In Desmond Doss’ example of truly living out the Christian faith we realize that if we endure to the end not only will we be saved, but as conscientious objectors and combat medics our mission is to save others as well. We are the children of our Father in Heaven and St. Peter tells us in our Epistle today that we are called to show forth God’s praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by *“having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Peter 2:12). St. Peter is writing to Christians about exactly what we witness in the example of Desmond Doss, the truth that actions really do speak louder than words. We can talk all day about theology and Christian morality, but talk is cheap, often irritating, and for the most part ignored by those who don’t believe. What doesn’t come cheap and cannot be easily ignored is action.

It’s one thing to talk about how much you love and want to serve your country. It’s something else to act – to choose to step unarmed onto a World War II battlefield, completely disregard your own life, and singlehandedly save the lives of more than 75 soldiers. It’s one thing to talk about how you have a heart for the homeless and needy in our community. It’s something else to act – to set your alarm on a Saturday morning so that you can serve your neighbor a hot breakfast. It’s one thing to talk about how you love God and long to grow closer to Him. It’s something else to act – to make worshipping Him in His house your first priority every Sunday and to spend a portion of the time that He has blessed you with every day in prayer and Bible study.

St. Peter is correct. People will speak against us, but he tells us this *“is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”* (1 Peter 2:15). The unbelieving world can speak against our words all day long, but they can’t speak against our good deeds accomplished by the grace of God and to the glory of God. The way Desmond Doss lived out his faith in Christ not only silenced those who persecuted him, his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination on the battlefield led others to glorify God. The world can speak against Christian beliefs and morality, but what can they say when faced with the objective truth that just one branch of the Christian Church is the largest non-government provider of health care in the world? What can they say to the fact that a Christian housing ministry which has helped over 10 million people find

affordable housing is the largest non-profit builder in the world? How do they respond to the work of non-profit Christian organizations like Compassion International, Food for the Hungry, or World Vision which minister to hundreds of millions of people around the world? Our words are a whisper of the voice of Christ, but in the noise of war a whisper can be hard to hear. When we live holy lives of service to God and our neighbor, our actions “*put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*” and allow the “*still small voice*” of God to be heard (1 Kings 19:12).

This world is a battlefield, and in the frenzy of battle it is often difficult to know what to do. When Desmond Doss was alone and unarmed on a World War II battlefield in his most desperate hour, he cried out to God seeking direction, the guidance of his Lord and Savior. When you hear his miraculous story it puts you to silence, you can't deny the fact that God answered his prayer, but it is important to notice his prayer was not answered with a quick, easy, or painless way out of the fight. Instead, God called Desmond to literally follow the example of Christ by setting aside his own will, taking up his own cross, and entering the battle to the end that he may rescue the wounded and dying. That is the type of Christianity that the world can't speak against and the kind of authentic Christian that God called Desmond Doss to be. On the battlefield of this world is God calling us to anything less?

“Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9).