

4.10.2022 Can we thank Him enough? (Matthew 27:1-54)

On December 4, 2006 while serving in the United States Army during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Private Ross McGinnis was in the gunner's hatch of a Humvee in Northeast Baghdad. That afternoon while Private McGinnis was manning the gun, a grenade thrown by an insurgent fell through the gunner's hatch into the vehicle. Private McGinnis reacted quickly, realizing the four other soldiers in the Humvee had no chance of escape, he called out a warning to his crew to prepare for the grenade's blast. Then, rather than leaping from the gunner's hatch to safety, Private McGinnis made the courageous decision to protect his crew. In an act of bravery that cost him his life, he covered the live grenade, pinning it between his body and the vehicle, absorbing most of the blast. Private Ross McGinnis of Knox, Pennsylvania, was just 19 years old when he gave his life to save the lives of four other American soldiers.

Staff Sergeant Ian Newland was one of the four soldiers whom Private McGinnis saved that day. He was quoted in a later interview as saying, "When someone gives you their life, can you thank them enough? Is that even possible?" As we reflect on this morning's Gospel reading, as we remember the Passion and Death of Our Savior, all that He gave to save our lives, let's consider that question. Can we thank Him enough? As the psalmist declares (116:12), "*What shall I, What can I, offer to the Lord for all the good he has done for me?*" This morning we will listen to several quotes from this interview with Staff Sergeant Newland, an eye-witness to the indescribable cost of sacrificing your life for another. Perhaps his words will help us regain some of the perspective that is so often lost over time, or due to repetition, or simply because of the many distractions of our lives.

Sergeant Newland said, "There's not a day that goes by that I don't remember what Ross did for me. He gave me back my life."

We thank God, and we bless His Holy Name when we remember, every day, what He did for us, that His One and Only Son bled and died on a Cross - that we may live. In the Gospel of John (10:17-18) we read these words of Jesus, "*I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...*" In our Gospel reading it appears that the life of our Lord was taken

by force, but in truth, it was surrendered. Jesus didn't find himself in that position because He couldn't avoid it, but freely placed Himself where the will of God the Father would be done. Earlier, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter took up a sword and began to fight, Jesus said to him (Matthew 26:53-54), "*Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled...*" Our Lord's hour had come, and Jesus, He had placed himself in a position not only to give His life for his friends, but for His enemies, for the insurgents. Remember, God's love was shown to us in that "*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8), and that's the greatest mystery, isn't it, that He would freely give His life for the guilty. By His precious Death and glorious Resurrection we are freed from sin, wrath, and the punishment we so justly deserve. We remember, and we thank our Lord for the purpose of His dying love. We thank God that He came to save all who believe, "*that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10).

Sergeant Newland said, "I have wonderful memories of Ross, but when the grenade detonated he was facing me; so I also have a memory of how gruesome combat can be."

The word of God tells us that we "*were bought at a price*" (1 Corinthians 6:20), but this side of heaven we can't truly grasp what it cost the Son of God that day, yet we honor Him and we thank Him when we contemplate how He suffered, and how responsible we are for His suffering. By thought, word, and deed, we said, "*Let Him be crucified!*" So the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall. "*And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him*" (Matthew 27:28-31). The prophet Isaiah tells us that "*His appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man, and His form was marred beyond human likeness*" (Isaiah 52:14). One commentator writes, "It as though Isaiah sits at the foot of the cross on Calvary, and sees the Redeemer as He hung upon the accursed tree, after He had been buffeted, and crowned with thorns, and smitten, and scourged, and

crucified; when His face was covered with bruises and with gore, and His frame and features distorted with agony." We "*were bought at a price*" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Sergeant Newland said, "My daughter still, every night when she says her prayers, thanks Ross for saving her daddy's life."

We thank God when we share "*His unspeakable gift*" (2 Corinthians 9:15) with the world He loves, when the lives of those around us are forever changed because we shared the Good News of the indescribable gift of God given through His Son. Private McGinnis gave his life so that four men could live, and Sergeant Newland isn't afraid or ashamed to share that news with the world, to speak of this gift with his family and others in a way that makes them all give thanks for such priceless gift. The gift we have been given was meant to be shared. Jesus said, "*As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you*" (John 20:21). Evangelism is not a suggestion, it's a command. Our Lord tells us to "*go and make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:19), because, as St. Paul stated, Jesus Christ "*gave His life to purchase freedom for everyone*" (1 Timothy 2:6). By the grace of God, we must carry His message to the world He loves and gave His life to save (John 3:16).

Sergeant Newland said, "I still have over fifty pieces of shrapnel left in my body from that explosion."

Sergeant Newland's life was saved that day, but not without a cost - not without a constant reminder. When we draw close to God, when we get close enough to Jesus to witness Him suffering, bleeding, and dying, we will be wounded. We will live every day with a constant reminder. To illustrate that truth, consider the example of Thomas. Holy Scripture tells us that "*Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God*" (John 20:24-28)

The season of Lent is our opportunity to learn from Thomas. Jesus said to him, "*Be not faithless, but believing.*" When Thomas was searching for faith in Christ, where did he look? The same place we must look. He looked to the wounded Christ. He didn't say to the other disciples, "Unless I see Him (Matthew 24:30) 'coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory' I will not believe." No, he wants to see the print of the nails, and to thrust his hand into His side. He wants to know that Jesus Christ, His Savior, died. That the God who made heaven and earth took on human flesh, was both God and man; suffered, bled, and died so that we would not die for our sins, but through faith, live. Thomas knew that without these wounds there is no victory. Without the Cross, no Resurrection. Without death, no new life. The five wounds in our Lord's Body mark His identity as Savior of the World. They prove the entire work of Jesus is true, complete, and accepted by God. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain! (Revelation 5:12)

"When someone gives you their life, can you thank them enough? Is that even possible?" In reference to the One who died for us: No. Absolutely not. Psalm 49 (7-8) tells us that, "*No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them - the ransom for a life is too costly, no payment is ever enough.*" We can't pay God the price for our lives; but while we can't repay, what we can do freely is respond. The simple message of this sermon is that when someone dies for you, it changes your life. So, if your life isn't changed, if you look like the rest of the world, perhaps you weren't close enough to the explosion. The season of Lent, and now as we enter Holy Week, this is our opportunity to draw near to Him, to place ourselves in that vehicle as Jesus Christ covers the grenade that our adversary the devil threw into this world to destroy us. Private Ross McGinnis knew that his friends had no chance to escape. Jesus Christ knew that we had no chance to escape, and so He willingly took our place on the Cross. "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). By His wounds, by His precious death, Jesus says to all of us, "I love you." Now is the time for each one of us to respond, "I love you too."