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PASTORAL LETTER – MAY 2022

Dear friend,

Our congregation has a historical and emotional link with our nation’s fallen. We have a cemetery where pre-Revolutionary soldiers are buried. Also, we have a proud legacy of former congregants who endured sacrifices so that we can enjoy our fundamental freedoms as a society, including our freedom of speech, and our freedom of religion.

A reverence for this historical connection is one of the reasons that I always look forward to holding an annual joint ceremony with the American Legion Post 429 of Rhinebeck at the cemetery, after our ordinary worship service concludes on the Sunday leading up to Memorial Day. I delight in gathering as a community to pay tribute to our fallen patriots, and to upholding the customs of our joint ceremony, such as reading the names of the patriots buried in our church’s cemetery, observing how American Flags (and a British Flag) are staked into the ground, and hearing the elegiac words of wisdom offered by someone with ties to the military—all among the meaningful components of this ceremony.

One of the striking things about this annual joint service is the reminder that the sacrifices and struggles of these fallen soldiers were always carried out for the larger community. There is an implication for each one of us in their commitment to creating a larger community, or a community of cooperation. These patriots are physically gone, but they depend on us to continue that for which they lived and died. Not only did we depend on them—their valor, their courage, their commitment, their patriotism—but they depend on us to continue “fighting the good fight” until we share with them in the fellowship of God’s promise.

Therefore, it is important to look at Memorial Day not just as a day of recollection, but as a day of participation. What can we do to enhance the legacy of our fallen patriots? What can we do to contribute to America’s well-being?

The good news is that we have the historical and spiritual company of our fallen heroes to motivate us, inspire us, and guide us in our quest to make our society a more hopeful one. We are blessed

to be part of a fellowship of saints and fallen heroes! To paraphrase Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in one of his poems, "Dedication Day", involving fallen Civil War soldiers: *"may their memory be our memory"* (see the poem below; may you bask in Longfellow's words).

May you have a safe, restful, and meaningful Memorial Day!

Pastor Luis

"Dedication Day"

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Sleep, comrades, sleep and rest
On this Field of Grounded Arms,
Where foes no more molest,
Nor sentry's shot alarms!

Ye have slept on the ground before,
And started to your feet
At the cannon's sudden roar,
Or the drum's redoubling beat.

But in this camp of Death
No sound your slumber breaks;
Here is no fevered breath,
No wound that bleeds and aches.

All is repose and peace,
Untrampled lies the sod;
The shouts of battle cease,
It is the Truce of God!

Rest, comrades, rest and sleep!
The thoughts of men shall be
As sentinels to keep
Your rest from danger free.

Your silent tents of green
We deck with fragrant flowers
Yours has the suffering been,
The memory shall be ours.