

Small Talk – May 28 2021
By Michael Small

As we approach Memorial Day, I am remembering those who have served and those who have died in service to these United States of America. I think of both of my grandfathers, an uncle, my father, and a cousin who all served in the military. Unlike many families, none of them died while engaged in wars. Though I have talked with many of you who lost brothers or fathers during combat, and I hear the stories from Gold Star families – stories of loss and devastation – stories of pride and honor. My prayers go to all of them. And I am thankful for the many women and men who serve today and the sacrifices they and their families are making every day. Perhaps on Monday, you may want to attend local Memorial Day services.

I pray for and I yearn for the days when we won't "study war no more" and when we will "beat our swords into ploughshares". I look forward to the days when significant monies will be invested in research and development for the studies of peace and how humans can live safely with one another without bursts of violent conflict. I applaud the work of the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo MI whose mission is "**Helping build the spiritual foundation for a loving world** – *At the Fetzer Institute, we believe in the possibility of a loving world: a world where we understand we are all part of one human family and know our lives have purpose. In the world we seek, everyone is committed to courageous compassion and bold love—powerful forces for good in the face of fear, anger, division, and despair.*" (www.fetzer.org)

We struggle to find that sense of peace as we "face fear, anger, division, and despair." There is an emerging disease that is sweeping our nation – it is the deification of what I am calling "Individual Rights". It seems that we worship at the altar of "Individual Rights". It seems that many in this nation have taken a good concept – individual rights balanced with the common good for all, and instead have obsessed on the rights of the individual to the peril of the common good. It is lived out in saying "I can do whatever I want to do, regardless of others or the whole." Friends, we are out of balance. It is seen in daily gun violence. It is acted out in legislation or the inability to do good legislation in our states and nation. To do good legislation is to compromise, compromise is being willing to sacrifice.

I would argue that individual rights only make sense when the individual is also able to embrace sacrifice – even self-sacrifice. There are times, in all of our lives, when we need to step aside, allow another to step in, to give up positions of power and control. There are times when we need to give up privilege for the good of the other, the good of the whole. It is written "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13) There will be times when you and I may need to, must be willing to be about sacrifice.

Memorial Day stands as a monument to all the sacrifices made for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. On Memorial Day we remember, and we honor. On this Memorial Day, may we become more balanced, may we appreciate and give thanks for those who have gone before us, doing what needed to be done. When asking my Uncle George about his experience of being on the front in France and Germany during World War II, he would always say, “I fought in that war so you wouldn’t have to fight.” He made many sacrifices, for me and for all children. I will remember Uncle George Kingston on this coming Monday! Thank you!

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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