

IT IS GOOD TO REMEMBER

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In the grand cycle of life, only four or five generations of humanity are accessible to our experience at any one moment in history. Those earlier men and women we must remember, and so we set aside this day to reflect on their contribution to our welfare.

It is important to remember because doing so fosters appreciation. None of us are self-made people. Those who went before set the range of possibilities that we choose among and now enjoy. Were it not for their sacrifices and labors, we would not have the freedoms we prize or many of the possessions we own. Surely we shape our own lives and mold their direction by our efforts, but those efforts are largely exerted within the options that have been handed down to us. We owe our ancestors a great debt of gratitude, and we inherit an obligation in turn to leave our legacy—to respect, cherish, and protect the privileges inherited our forefathers.

In this same vein, we remember in order to appreciate the gifts of our creator. He has been our primary benefactor in setting up life itself with its good things. It is within these options that we labor and gain satisfaction from labor, within which we relate to family, friends, and fellowman and receive pleasure in so doing. We have not made ourselves, nor have we made many of the possibilities that we by effort shape to our particular interests.

It is important to remember in order to have proper humility. When we stop to appreciate the boundless happiness that has come to us from those before us and from no effort of our own, we are not inclined to boast in our fair estate. We take proper pride in our condition and duly understand that it is ours by grant more than by merit.

It is important to remember so we may have a sense of responsibility. As the legacy of the past passes to us unearned, so also in the cycle of life we have our turn to pass on undiminished the freedoms, rights, and duties we first received. We would not prove to be lesser guardians of the good, the true, and the beautiful than those who toiled and even died in making sure their offspring could lead peaceful and fruitful lives.

That means we must be strong in the moments of decision that bear on our destiny and that of our children. In those moments of choice is set the subsequent course of human existence and world affairs.

*“Once to every man and nation Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision, Off’ring each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever ’Twixt that darkness and that light.*

*“Then to side with truth is noble, When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, And ‘tis prosp’rous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses While the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude makes virtue Of the faith they had denied.*

“Though the cause of evil prosper, Yet the truth alone is strong;

*Though her portion be the scaffold, And upon the throne be wrong,
 Yet that scaffold sways the future, And, behind the dim unknown,
 Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.”*

“Once to Every Man and Nation” by James Russel Lowell
 Often set to the hymn tune *Ebenezer*

National conflict and political unrest have taken their toll on the lives of many honored dead we remember today, but those evils manifest more basic and more eternal evils that erupt in strife between nations, classes, and individuals. The spiritual wickedness that separates people from their God separates them also from each other; it devastates people and destroys the quality of life and its meaningfulness for all humankind. For this reason, with these memorable words the apostle Paul urged responsibility on his readers many years ago:

“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:10-17, NIV)

The spiritual aspect of life sets the character of our material existence in the world. We do well to remember today the universal and eternal importance of this factor because from it issues all that we value and hold dear. And therein rests most of all our appreciation, our humility, our responsibility.