

## What do the dead tell us?

Scripture Reading: Psalm 78:1-8

People have sent us messages from the past. They have spoken things. They have written things. They have drawn / painted / carved things. They have built things. They have killed for things. They have died for things. The hard work that history, literature, and art give us is to learn and benefit from the messages given to us by those who lived before us.

Words, decisions, and actions are among the main ways that we communicate. In the United States of America, we have separated a day and called it “Memorial Day” – a day to remember those who died in combat, fighting for our nation and its freedoms. Perhaps one of the most famous tributes ever made to those who died in battle is the Gettysburg Address, given by Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The world actually has remembered these words that were spoken. Granted, there were many other speeches that day – long ones! They are probably recorded somewhere. But we don't think about them. Mr. Lincoln's message was simple: *Actions speak louder and longer than words*. But for all the military cemeteries we have, it is doubtful that we think, meditate, and learn enough from the message of the dead. Today, people are arguing, but not learning.

- Who are the heroes? / Who are the villains?
- Will the wars ever cease?
- Was this nation worth fighting for? / Should we tear it apart and start another one?
- Since we are so bad at governing ourselves, should we just surrender to a global government and let our lives be someone else's responsibility?
- What does it mean to preserve the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? / Who gave us that right?

### **We need to consider the message found in Psalm 78.**

As a historical psalm (cp. Psalm 106), it gives a commentary on what things happened with the people of Israel and what lessons should be learned by their descendants and all of us. Here are just a few thoughts from Psalm 78:1-8:

- Learning from history is a dark and difficult task – like solving a riddle or a parable. It requires diligence and time to meditate. (Psalm 78:1-2 cp. Proverbs 1:5-6).
- It is important for each generation to speak to the next generation (Psalm 78:3-6).
- It is important to include God's work and God's word, as we tell our narrative (HIS-tory – Psalm 78:4-5).
- The goal of our narrative is to cause people to trust and obey God – to put their hope in God – not man (Psalm 78:7).
- We must be humble and honest, as we note the failure of man, demonstrating that when we forget and forsake God and His ways, we bring misery upon ourselves and the next generation (Psalm 78:8 cp. Exodus 20:1-6).

### **Two great messages from the past:**

- Psalm 145:1-21
- Hebrews 12:1-3, 18-29