

3/27/2015
Good Friday Services

I would like to thank the Sisters' of Divine Providence for their Daily Reflections during this Lenten Season. I found them inspirational and very shepherding in preparing me for Easter. I would also like to thank Father Grey for requesting that I provide the reflections today. I have wanted to make a good Lenten season and my research, studies and preparation for this reflection helped me to be a better Christian with a deeper understanding and appreciation for our faith.

In September of 1968 I was in my final year at Community College of Allegheny County where I was completing a two year program to become an Engineering Technician. I was part of a group of four students that formed a close friendship and studied together with the commitment to graduate the following year. Jim, one of our members, decided at the beginning of that semester to enlist in the US Army for a two year tour of duty in Vietnam. We all had a **deferment** from the military and under no pressure to enlist. I and others tried our best to discourage Jim.

As you may recall 1968 was the height of the Vietnam War for America and its allies, against the North Vietnamese. The U.S. government viewed American involvement as a way to prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam. There were many protesters against this unpopular war and the general sentiment was that the US was not in it to win. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, years later, stated that we made a mistake engaging in the Vietnam conflict. He admits that he realized during the war we would not win but continued directing a losing strategy. Jim enlisted because of his strong sense of Duty and headed to Basic training for an eight week period.

I was just returning from Christmas break when Jim got home from Basic Training in early January. Jim took the time to meet with me and his fellow classmates before heading overseas. Jim expressed that this would be the last time any of us would see him because he was certain that he would not return. We all questioned Jim, that if he had such a strong feeling about his demise why go. Jim felt it was his duty to fight for our country to preserve the freedom that we are so accustomed to. Jim must have realized from his training and assignment that his unit had a low survival rate.

I graduated on June 5th 1969 and Jim was killed seven days later. My life was just starting as Jim's ended. I heard about his death on the 11 o'clock evening news. I was shocked by how "***matter of fact***" the News anchor announced his death. Jim's military records stated that " he was killed by small arms fire", but as I viewed his body, I could see his face and lips were swollen and **black and blue marks** were evident where the makeup was wearing off. I speculated that he did not die immediately but must have suffered.

As I paid my respects to Jim's family, I anticipated that his Father would have resentment towards me and my fellow classmates over the loss of his Son, but to the contrary, he was very kind. To this day, I can still hear Mr. Englemeier's comforting and kind words that "**this was all in GOD's plan and things like this happen to benefit us (the Living) so that we realize how precious life is and appreciate every day.**" **We are to learn from Jim's sacrifice to live a better life.**

I felt guilty that my friend died so young and missed so much of life; I admire his courage and often thought of what strength he had to go to war in spite of his threatening feeling. I enjoy my freedom today because of Jim. I have a **Rubbing** from the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC of Jim's name. It is hanging in my office to remind me of his sacrificed for us, and for me. I have thought of him often over the years and can't help to realize the tremendous price our service people paid, who died, at such an early age. There were 412 soldiers from Allegheny County that were killed in the Vietnam War. The Monument that is constructed in the Court Yard of the Family Courts facility reads that we lost Four hundred and One TOO Many. (It was a play on words) For me, Jim was the one Too many

As I journey through life, I realize his lost increasingly as my life experiences continued. Even during my worst times, I realized that Jim is missing so much.

I feel the same guilt over Jesus's Passion and death. I think of Jesus's time in the garden of Gethsemane. He knew ***in great detail*** exactly what lay ahead of him and what suffering he would encounter over the next days. He entered into his last days with love for us all and full awareness of his human fate.

As a catholic, I have been exposed to the Passion from my earliest memories. My beliefs have matured over the years. Initially, I tried to remove myself from any responsibility of Christ death and suffering. I put blame on those who crucified our Lord and if I had to associate myself with anyone at the crucifixion it was Simon from Cyrene, who carried the cross for Jesus. As I grow older, I realize that I have to take the responsibility that my sins put Jesus on the cross. I rationalized as an Engineer that I am one of trillions, and my sins when considered with all the generations that came before me and all that will come after; would amount to a very small portion of Jesus suffering. Now I have come to the full realization that Jesus suffered for my sins and ever time I elect to sin; I become one of his crucifiers. During those times I am the Pharisees who decided to kill Jesus; Pontius Pilate who washed his hands of it; the Romans who beat, throned and crucified him; and the soldier who spared him.

In closing, I realize that the comforting words Jim's Father graciously expressed to me about the death of his son, are no different than the comforting words that God our Father expresses to us about His Son, but so much more. God, the Father, loved us so much that it was His plan for His Son to die so that we may benefit. However, the Passion that we are experiencing today is not the finale. Christ's death was not the end. It was only the precursor to receiving the greatest gift that mankind will ever experience. It is in His Resurrection that we can live. This gift is what sets us apart and this is what I'm grateful us for every day of my life.