

In WWI—the United States lost more than 54,000 citizens in battle over two years. It was one of the most brutal wars the world had seen, with horrific casualties. They dubbed it “the war to end all wars.”

But it was not to be. WWII was worse. We lost almost 292,000 in the four years we battled for freedom over the fascism of Hitler.

Then: 81,000 of our soldiers died in the years of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, wars: 25 years of our history.

You might think we were becoming inured to battle. But we weren’t. Maybe that’s because many of us remembered that the biggest amount of casualties in a single event in these United States of America, was during the Civil War-- the war that had by far the highest death toll we’ve sustained as a country. We lost nearly 500,000 people.

The figures I’m quoting are from the Office of Public and Veteran Affairs in Washington DC. Now, we pray for our military on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. We take seriously the risk these men-- and women—are taking when they become a part of the military. Military people fight, and military people die. It’s part of the job.

Of our *more recent military conflicts*, WWI & II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and the Gulf Wars – all of these combined have cost us about 428,000 lives in battle.

I am glad we remember these people who have fought and who have died. We have parades, and wear flag lapel pins, and even have national holidays to remember them. And we should.

The last pandemic this country went through—the flu pandemic of 1918—cost us 675,000 lives.

Our current pandemic, which is not yet finished with us, the doctors tell us—has cost us as I write this: 231,506 lives.

231,506 people have died in the last 6 months. These people had lives, and families, they served the country as doctors and teachers, as truckers, as

grocery store clerks. Each of them had dream of a future. Most of these quarter of a million people didn't have the luxury of dying with their families or friends around them. They didn't die for a cause. They weren't remembered or decorated or paraded after they did.

Most of their families are still waiting to have their funerals. The families of these citizens who have died are in shock, some because they will never have that last chance to say I love you to their spouse, or father, or sister again, some because they can't believe that people are saying that this disease isn't that bad, it's something that's been dramatized by the media.

Tell that to the people who have lost their family members.

I think we need to remember them, today. On All Saints day.

We need to remember the nearly a quarter of a million people who have died from Covid 19 this year. And their families. And their friends.

The beatitudes are always read on All Saints Day, every year. After this difficult 2020, I'm beginning to understand why.

Because the Beatitudes speak of pain. Because all of us have lost people this year. We certainly have lost more than 230,000 loyal US citizens. All of us have grieved the loss relationships, hugs, and companionship. We mourn. So--see if you can find yourselves in Jesus' words-- with thanks to the translation of Eugene Peterson.

"Blessed are you when you're at the end of your rope. God is holding the other end of the rope.

Blessed are you when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One who hold you most dear.

Blessed are you when you're content with exactly who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

Blessed are you when you've worked up a good appetite for God. God is food and drink, and the best meal you'll ever eat.

Blessed are you when you care. When you yourself are full of care-- you find yourself cared for.

Blessed are you when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in everyone and everything in the outside world.

Blessed are you when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and you find your place in God's family.

Blessed are you when people are mad that your commitment is first to God, and God's people. You will find their anger driving you even deeper into God's kingdom of love.

Count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you when you are following me. What this means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. Be very glad when that happens—others may be threatened by you following me, but I love it. And all of heaven applauds. Know that you stand in good company with others who have gotten into this kind of trouble before you.”

The beatitudes. They look at grief without flinching. They see the pain, And they offer us hope.

I think they mean more to me this year, because THIS year we have had to confront our fears, say goodbye to Karen Laite, Sally, Bill, John, my dad—and others.. It's been hard-- taking up that cross of love. And love is always worth it.

In 2020, the year none of us will forget, lets us **remember** and bless all those who have died. Let us bless those who serve. Bless those who are sick. Bless those who are weary. Bless those who mourn. And let us never forget that every one of those Saints of God will rise in light and stand with all those who have gone before them.

God bless us all. God will comfort us, guide us, love us. Until this long season is over. Amen.