

BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD
BY THE REV. THOMAS H. ROSE

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! Jehovah of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Psalm 46:11)

We have a long-established tradition in this country of remembering and honoring those who have given their lives to preserve our freedom. It is right and fitting that we do this. In the United States there are many people—men and women—who have served or who currently serve with honor in the armed forces in defense of our country, and Veterans Day is set aside to acknowledge their contribution and dedication. At this time of year, however, we turn our thoughts to those of our community, to those of any community in the nation, who have made what is known as “the ultimate sacrifice”—dying in the line of military duty.

Some of us have experienced the loss of someone we loved in time of war. For some, a family member died in battle. For others, it was a friend or fellow soldier, sailor, airman or marine. For all, the loss is felt deeply, and the senselessness of the circumstances of war is brought to mind. David expresses these feelings in the book of Samuel. When Saul, the king of Israel, and Jonathan, David's closest friend, died at the hands of the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David spoke these words to the people, in a psalm known as the Song of the Bow:

“The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!
Tell it not in Gath,
Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon -
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

O mountains of Gilboa,
Let there be no dew, nor let there be rain upon you,
Nor fields of offerings.
For the shield of the mighty is cast away there!
How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!
Jonathan was slain in your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan..." (2 Samuel
1:19-26)

We have set aside a time of remembrance for those who have died in service to our country. What is it that we remember the most in our distress over such a loss? It is the person's willingness to lay down his or her very life for family, friends and country. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." This applies to circumstances of life other than wars between nations. We extend expressions of honor and gratitude to anyone who has suffered loss or sacrifice, particularly when it is seen to be for our own sake. We all can picture someone dear to us who has given up something in order to be a better person. We may have someone in our life who has struggled grievously through troubled times and who has come out the other side a more spiritual person, to the benefit not only of himself, but also of all around him. Like the soldier who lost his earthly life, this person, too, has fought a great battle, and something within him has had to die in order that the good and the true might emerge.

How often this takes place in life! We honor and respect those who have suffered spiritual temptations. We suffer through them ourselves, and we see that this is the only true and noble way to attain the life of heaven. Very often we are instructed and reminded in the Lord's Heavenly Doctrine that the only way to spiritual life is through spiritual combats against the hells—not so much against the hells in general, but against our own personal hells, which stand in the way between us and the Lord.

In the life of regeneration, the life that leads to heaven, the Lord calls us, as it were, into military service. He calls us into combat to fight against the influences of the selfish will, our old, unregenerate self. This aspect of self, twisted and perverse in the light of heaven, must actually die if the birth of the new self is to take place. The Lord says in the book of John, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24).

It is good and right to honor those who have died in service to our country. Love of country is of paramount importance as a love for one's homeland, which nurtures and protects. Love of country is transformed into a greater love, that is, a love for the Lord's heavenly kingdom. It is noble and brave to die for one's country because it is an expression of love to the neighbor and a grand gesture of protection of the innocent. What we are honoring, however, when we remember a person who has died in this way, is the person's willingness to do such a thing for the sake of others. We are not honoring the fact that they died, and we are not honoring war; we are honoring the person's spirit of service, duty and self-sacrifice.

Again, we are reminded of the very simplest of sacrifices people make to the benefit of others. When a person puts his own self-interest aside and extends love and support toward another, then that person has laid down something of his life for his friend. When a person acts with kindness, even if it is inconvenient to do so, there is a laying down of a bit of the life of self-indulgence that comes so naturally to us all. When a person struggles to give up something within that is wrong and self-gratifying because the Lord has said it is wrong, there is a laying down of one's life for the Lord Himself. The Lord said, “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:39).

This gives us something to think about: losing our life for the Lord's sake, and laying down our life for our friends. The Lord is asking us to give up our life for the sake of the two great commandments. There is no greater sacrifice. Listen to this story from the book of Mark:

Then one of the scribes came...and asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one. And you shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." So when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that, no one dared question Him (Mark 12:28-34).

"You are not far from the kingdom of God." We are not far from the kingdom of God if we have a full understanding and practice of what it is to lay down the life of our old self, our old will, for the sake of the new self or new will. It is the most difficult thing a person can possibly do, and none can do it without the Lord.

The evils and falsities of our natural mind, before the Lord makes us new, are like a family to us. They are familiar. We love them. About them, the Lord gives a remarkable teaching in the gospel of Mark: "And great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and

sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”(Mark 14:25-27).

Hereditary tendencies toward evil and falsity are like a negative or even a hellish “father and mother.” Self-serving, harmful, ungodly and lustful desires are present in our minds. We identify with them, and they become to us as “brothers and sisters.” We must recognize this or we will perish, spiritually. In addition, our mind gives birth to evil actions and false ideas—things that we actually make our own and do. These are our “children,” in the negative sense. And that thing which dominates us in a negative way, that which we hold dear to our hearts, is our “wife.” These are the things of the old self that we must reject in favor of the Lord and the neighbor. These are the things that we must come to recognize as our enemies. There must be war—a great spiritual combat. The casualties of this kind of war will be those terrible influences of the hells which have occupied the territory of our unregenerate natural mind and which, as a family of negative persuasion, have shaped our former self. From a willingness to follow the Lord and to establish His heavenly kingdom within us, there comes a willingness to lay down this former life, even as a soldier lays down his bodily life in an earthly war.

There are wars and there will be wars in this world. The Lord makes it very clear, however, that earthly wars are not the subject of His Holy Word. Even in the story of David lamenting the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, the true meaning has to do with spiritual combat. Again and again, there are stories of war in the Word, and in every case, the message is about every person's personal spiritual battles, and about the Lord's own combats and victories over the hells for the salvation of the human race. When the lesson is about spiritual combat, the Prince of Peace is called a Warrior, a Commander of battle. When Joshua was

about to face war, the Lord appeared to him in the form of a great Angel: And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of Jehovah I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of Jehovah's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15) The psalm of our lesson has this message: "Be still, and know that I am God."

To give up our life or to lay it down for our friends is to turn away from the evils and falsities that are present in our natural mind, to do combat against them from the power of the Lord's Word. This is to take the sandals off our feet in the holy presence of our Savior and Deliverer. To quiet the old self before the Lord, to bring to a halt all of the influences that would keep us from the Lord and the neighbor, is to "be still, and know" that the Lord is our God.

Every year, in this last weekend in May, we are grateful in our remembrance of those who have given their lives in our defense. It is a selfless act of courage to have done so. We are keenly aware that our gratitude focuses on their willingness to serve God, country and neighbor in such a way as to make this sacrifice. We are grateful to all veterans for their willingness to do this, and we remember with love and respect those who have fallen in war for the sake of our own peace.

At the same time, we are grateful for their reminding us that there is no peace in our own mental territories without our making the same kind of sacrifice, losing our former life for the attainment of true heavenly peace. Everyone who has endured the suffering of spiritual combat has the honor of self-sacrifice

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in the advancement of the Lord's heavenly kingdom and its true peace.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...”

“Be still, and know that I am God...”

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 46; John 15:7-17; *Arcana Coelestia* 1664



The Rev. Thomas H. Rose was inaugurated into the priesthood in 1988, and ordained into the pastoral degree in 1989. He began by serving as Assistant to the pastor at the Mitchellville Society, i.e Sharon Church, Maryland, and then in 1989, as Assistant Pastor there, taking on also the office of Principal of the New Church School. In 1990 he added the role of Visiting Pastor to the Baltimore New Church. In 1993 Tom became the Pastor for the Bryn Athyn Church Elementary School for nine years. In 2002 he accepted the call to be resident Pastor for the Connecticut Circle, Connecticut. Now he is Pastor of Ivyland New Church Pennsylvania, starting in 2004. Tom and his wife Annette (Henderson) reside on the property at Ivyland Church, Pennsylvania.