

Robert L Wachtelhausen Memorai  
June 20, 2017

Life is precious.  
Every moment counts. Every person counts.

Those words can sound like platitudes, I suppose,  
until we find ourselves at an occasion such as this, marking the passing of a life.  
Especially a life such as the one we honor today.

Any of us who had the privilege of knowing Bob Wachtelhausen  
know that Bob made the 95 years of his earthly pilgrimage count.  
We know how important his family was to him,  
that he loved God and this his parish church.  
(It's not much of an exaggeration to say that his face glowed like a little kid on Christmas  
morning when, in his later years, his family was able to bring him here to worship –  
be it for his birthday or to see altar flowers given in memory of Doris.)

We know Bob was a Mason, and a respected member of  
the Ashlar community where he lived.  
And so with all the many pursuits and commitments that fill 95 years well-lived.

But above all, Bob Wachtelhausen was a man of service,  
of patriotic service to his country.  
Those of us here today,  
really, anyone who met Bob for two minutes would know,  
that Bob proudly served in the Navy in WWII.

And yet, reading his wonderful obituary I was struck by the fact that of his 95 years,  
only three – 1942-1945 – were spent in the navy.

Of course I know the duration and timeline of the war.  
Of course I've known other veterans from that war,  
including my own father who served in the Pacific.  
But I don't think I've ever known anyone whose entire life  
was so fully and wonderfully formed by the experience.  
And not in a nostalgic, looking-back-to-the-glory-days-kind-of-way,  
but in a very vital, present moment kind of way.  
In a way that said with every fiber of his being,  
*this is the best of who I am and I want to share it with you.*

And that is exactly what he did – with most everyone here today,  
but I also can attest every parishioner who ever brought him communion, or  
Thanksgiving fruit baskets, or Christmas poinsettias or Easter lilies or... you get the idea.  
Everyone, to a person, came back touched – I dare say, even changed –

by having encountered the wonderful man named Bob  
who told them stories and showed them memorabilia of his service.  
And it made such a profound impact, because Bob wasn't just sharing memories,  
he was *sharing himself*.

We as Christians shouldn't be surprised by this.  
After all, we promise to model our lives on that of Jesus,  
whom God chose to send in this frail human flesh  
to show us how to live, how to love and serve.  
To show us once and for all that life is precious.  
Every moment counts. Every person counts. All is grace.

It is the story of how Jesus lived his short life,  
and how he died for us and rose again to lead us to new and eternal life,  
that gives meaning and purpose to our lives.  
It forms us into who we are in this life  
into the life to come.

Robert Wachtelhausen lived this.  
As much as he enjoyed and brought joy in this earthly life,  
I believe that he is experiencing an even greater fullness of joy now, in his new life.  
For we clearly saw intimations of it in the way he lived this life,  
knowing – by the grace of God in Christ – that life is precious;  
making every moment count;  
making every person he met feel as if they counted.

Such a gift. Such a comfort. Such a witness for us all.

Thanks be to God.

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