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Lenten Editorial: I Remember, 1943

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I REMEMBER

It is Wednesday evening. With the first faint signs of Spring about me I am walking the streets of my town at an unaccustomed hour. The harshness of the air of January and February has almost disappeared. The snow which came last night is gone, and water runs audibly beside the sidewalks. There is a new restlessness in the trees waiting for the near miracle of Spring. A good time to walk.

Tonight many people will be in church -- as many as the church can hold. They will sing the old hymns again. Hymns which were first heard in the churches of Germany and the chapels of England. We shall sing them tonight in unconscious demonstration of the fact that beyond the things the evening paper said about England and Germany there is still something else -- an unbroken unity, a high peace, a common destiny. Our preacher will preach a good sermon, thoughtful, solid, direct. It will be good to be there.

This sort of thing has now been going on for 1900 years, in catacombs and cathedrals, in the jungles and the Arctic, among the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish, the great and the humble. As I walk to church tonight I am in a procession which is longer than any other in the history of men. Ahead of me, almost lost in the distance of time, are people like Adam, Moses, David, Isaiah, Peter, John, Paul, Augustine and Luther. Behind me in the procession are these young men and women who go to school in my town. A host of others, too, whose names I don't know. The great procession whose beginning and end is a Cross. Walking in such a line I remember some things which need remembering.

I look at the trees and remember. Here in my town the trees are tall and straight. The elms and maples of Indiana. Long ago, in the Garden, they were gnarled and short. The olive trees of Palestine. There is no moon tonight, but long ago through the twisted branches of the olive trees the Paschal moon lighted the twisted hands of Him to Whom we shall sing tonight. Never in all their years of heat and cold had the olive trees seen a stranger thing. He and the eleven who were left after one had gone into the night by another way had come to the hill of olive trees for the last time. Eight rested in one place, and three slept in another place. Only for Him there was no rest. Tortured hands, lips moving in agony, great drops as of blood dripping into the dust from which man had come, and to which one Man had to return so that there might be a higher destiny for all others. The trees He had created and the moon He had set in its course heard His crying in the night. A strange story. The same pen that told us how a great army of angels honored with their carols God made a Child, now tells us how one angel came and strengthened God made a Man, despised and forsaken of all other men. But because the olive trees saw that in the light of the last Paschal moon, the elms and maples of my town see several hundred of us hurrying through the streets this quiet Spring night. To remember. Gratefully.

O. P. Kretzmann