

February 13, 2024

Re: SB431

From: Roy Wenzl, author, "The Miracle of Father Kapaun"

Disposition: Neutral

To Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

It is fitting that you consider placing a memorial in the state capitol building to war hero Father Emil Kapaun. Those elected to work here come to this building to lead people to a better life.

But picture having Chaplain Kapaun here to watch over your work every day. He was no cliché. For ten months during the Korean War, on battlefields and then in a prisoner of war death camp, the farm kid from Pilsen put on a dazzling clinic about how to lead desperate people to do things they emphatically did not want to do.

He inspired starving, shell-shocked men to feed and care for each other when every bodily instinct tempted selfishness. He inspired prisoners of war -- so weak they could barely stand -- to repeatedly defy Communist propaganda officers who tried to coerce them to denounce their own country. Protestants, Jews and agnostic prisoners prayed the Catholic rosary with him night after night, not because they wanted to convert but because they would do anything for him. For that guy. For that leader.

He did this by modeling his leadership on the Jesus of the Gospels, a model that Jesus himself defined as servant leadership.

Picture him running through gunfire with a bleeding soldier in his arms. See also how other men see him do this. See him take dictation as he helps a wounded 19-year-old write a letter to his parents. See him give his own food away to stop starving prisoners from stealing from each other. And picture hundreds of men watching him do these things.

"Men find it easy to follow one who has endeared himself to them," he wrote.

All his reckless heroics, all his fox-hole-digging, and all those days when he stole food from the camp guards -- it was him helping others, but it was also calculated, to win the hearts of people so that he could empower them to save themselves. His crucial insight was that while he wanted to save the world, he knew he could not do it alone.

Roy Wenzl
Wichita, Kansas