

- 1 The Vietnam War of the 1960s and 70s provokes mixed feelings amongst the people of the United States. Their government drafted young men to go to Vietnam in south-east Asia to stop the spread of Communism. America eventually withdrew in 1975 as South Vietnam surrendered to the Communist North.
- 2 Whatever people's feelings are about that war, 58,000 Americans were amongst those who were killed. Many veterans returning to the United States felt themselves being rejected by people and by the government, all of whom simply wanted to forget Vietnam. One of the returning veterans wrote: *"All we want is for people to recognise the sacrifices and contributions we made because the country we love told us it was right."*
- 3 A small group of veterans began to organise the raising of money for a memorial to those who had died, hoping that it would be a means towards peace and reconciliation.
- 4 It was decided that the memorial would be simple in style, and a competition was held to choose the best. As the foundations were being laid, a navy pilot in uniform brought to the site his dead brother's "Purple Heart" medal for bravery, and said: *"He and I flew together. I'd like to put his medal into the concrete foundations as they are being poured."* He saluted as he did so.
- 5 The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington is of two 250-foot walls of black polished granite, cut into the earth. The two walls are set at an angle to make a V-shape. On the walls are carved the names of all the 58,000 Americans who had died, and they are listed according to the date on which they were killed.
- 6 On this day in 1982 the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial was dedicated. To emphasise that each person was unique, all 58,000 names

were read out in a 56-hour vigil in Washington's National Cathedral nearby. One of the volunteers who was to read names had been awarded a 'Congressional Medal of Honour'. He lasted only five minutes before he broke down and cried. The rest of the names allocated to him he read out kneeling down. Time slots were announced in advance so that relatives a great distance away would know precisely when the name of their loved one would be read.

- 7 Many who visit the memorial nowadays, place paper over a relative's name and rub over it with a crayon. Some leave photographs and other reminders. Many people are overwhelmed on seeing all the 58,000 individual names. As visitors look at the long walls that bear the names, they see themselves in the reflection of the polished granite.
- 8 *Let us pray:*

**I leave my own past
to your mercy, Lord.
I entrust the present
to your love,
and the future
to your providence. Amen.**

This is an excerpt from the page of this date in
'Praying Each Day of the Year',
a 3-volume book
by Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC.

For details:

<http://www.matthew-james.co.uk/>

Could make use of a search engine
to research this topic further.

This material is part of
the prayer and education website
of the De La Salle Brothers
in Great Britain:

www.prayingeachday.org