

Memorial Day

Introduction

Thank you so much for being here. In particular, I want to thank Father Patrick Carrion who oversees cemeteries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. I also want to thank my brother Knights of Columbus for your presence this morning and for your constant support.

For a few moments, let's reflect on Memorial Day. It is a civil holiday but it has religious meaning. What, then, is the meaning of this day?

Memorial Day

Memorial Day is about remembering, especially our beloved dead. In a special way we remember those who have given their lives in defense of our nation. They have paid the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. They have died so that the world might be more just and peaceful.

We remember those who died in the wars of the last century and the armed conflicts of these early decades of the 21st century. These members of our armed forces left behind their families and jobs; they left behind their friends and the safety of their homes and put themselves in harm's way. This morning we pray for an end to war, for an end to violence, for an end to the religious persecutions and conquests in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. And we ask that those who gave their lives in defense of our nation may rest in the peace and joy of the Kingdom of God.

Here in Baltimore it is also an appropriate day to remember those who have met with violent deaths on our streets. Their number is mounting and this is of greatest concern to all of us. Even as we pray for a restoration of trust between law enforcement and the community, so too we pray that the killings in our streets will quickly come to an end. We pray too that we will pull together as a community to end those conditions in which violence is so easily incited. Let us pray for those who died on the streets. Sadly we cannot point to a good cause for which they died; it might be drugs, or shoes, or a little money. And there may be no one to pray for many of those who have died. Let it be ourselves - a small group offering Mass in this cemetery. May these people, many of them young, rest in peace!

In the same breath, we remember those in law enforcement, here and elsewhere, who have died in the line of duty. While they are currently under intense scrutiny, the vast majority of those in law enforcement seek to do their jobs with integrity and serve the common good of our communities in many, many ways. Protect those who do this work for us each day, Lord, and take unto yourself those who have died.

On this Memorial Day we also remember our deceased family members and friends. Here in this cemetery so many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles are buried. We think too of the priests and religious who served us so faithfully who lie here. Let us learn from their lives, give thanks for their goodness, and ask the Lord to grant them everlasting life. So we pause to remember, to give thanks, and to commend our beloved dead to the everlasting mercies of God.

The Memorial That Is the Eucharist

The civil holiday we call “Memorial Day” is all about remembering. It’s all about recalling our beloved dead and the sacrifices they made for us. When the Church speaks about remembering, it means something different.

On the night before he died, Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He commanded the disciples, “Do this in memory of me.” The Church’s memory is like our ordinary memories but it is also different. It’s like our memories in that the Church recalls all that the Lord said and did to bring about our salvation. But it’s different in this sense: when the Church recalls what Jesus did for us, the Lord becomes spiritually present to us. Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross is not locked in the past but it becomes present to us in a unique way every time Mass is celebrated. In this way you and I can share in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection to forgive sin and to ensure that death is not the last word about our lives. Jesus’ saving love, made present in the Eucharist, is stronger than sin and more powerful than death itself.

There is no better way to remember our beloved dead than in a Mass. Here we offer Christ’s perfect sacrifice for those who have gone before us; we are able to share with them and for them that love which is stronger than sin and more powerful than death. As Jesus shares with us his gift of self, we ask him to bring our beloved dead home safely to the joys of heaven.

Conclusion

So let us pray for all those who have gone before us: Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.