

[Readings: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35,44-48; 98; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17]

I don't really know all of the abbreviations used in texting. I know what "LOL" means: "Laugh out loud." "TTFN" means "Tata for now!" My twin sister taught me what "LMAO" means, but I cannot say it in church! I learned last year what "BFF" means: "Best Friends Forever." Question: How many Best Friends Forever in your life have remained Best Friends Forever? The problem with our "forever" is not so much our sincerity as our limitations.

We are mortal; that is, material with an expiration date that will be sooner than we think, no matter what we think. And everything else about us has its limits, too: patience, talent, endurance, health, compassion, kindness, and love included.

When we make our vows and speak our "forever," we always do it while holding our breath. We *hope* to be faithful forever. At least, we're sure gonna try. Meanwhile, in that same breath, sin is at work in us and in our world, doing its darnedest to make liars of us.

Sin lurks at the edges of our goodness and our best intentions. Its victory is in our failure and, ultimately, in the death of our will to so much as try. The ultimate victory for sin used to be in its supreme price: the sting of death, the obliteration of the final chance to try. But something looms larger than death on the horizon of our humanity: God's love for us. Because God has no problem when it comes to "forever." So we believe.

No one has a greater love to show us than this. The compassion of Jesus, faithful all the way to the cross, demonstrates that love beyond a shadow of a doubt. If we're really looking for true love forever, this is it. And if we hold fast to it, we are promised a joy so complete, nothing will be lacking ever again.

One of the lines from the great American movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, used to puzzle me even as a kid. Near the end of the movie, when the Wizard finally presents the Tin Man with his honorarium, a ticking heart to fill his sense of

emptiness, he advises him with these words, "Remember, my friend: A heart is not judged by how much you love but by how much you are loved by others."

This saying confounded me. It went against everything I had been taught about evaluating myself according to the volume of my efforts.

In the end, as I stand before my King and Judge, won't I be judged by how much I loved other people? If my "work" in the business of love was not the standard and the message, then what was? What seems clearer to me in adulthood is that we cannot be at the center of our efforts to love. Of course we must have healthy self-regard and take care of ourselves before we begin.

But love, by definition, is a movement toward the other and for the sake of the other. The Beloved, the one we love, is always at the center. We can never be the measure of our own love. If we attempt to evaluate the success of our love by our experience, we have already failed.

So, if the Wizard's advice to the Tin Man doesn't win you over, then consider the writer of the First Letter of John: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that God loved us and sent the Son as expiation for our sins." All of salvation is dependent, not on our efforts, but on God's. God's love is at the heart of the Christian faith, not ours.

Our love may be quite sincere, much of the time, and our works of love may be considerable. But in the end, all the love we finite folk are capable of isn't enough to save our necks or our souls. Fear not: God's got an infinite amount of love to give, and it's being lavished in our direction. And we are challenged to share it. How do we move from loving only a few to loving many, many more?

Those of us who are over 60 years old remember when the world was divided into two categories when we were kids: The Catholics and the "Publics." We had a different idea of where the "Publics" were going to end up when THEY died; we knew with absolute certainty where WE were going!

Saint Peter seemed to be trapped in that way of thinking. But just as the Roman Centurion Cornelius had his conversion, so did St. Peter. Entering the house of a Gentile was considered unclean, but Peter does it anyway.

The Holy Spirit stirs in the house of Cornelius, and his entire household is saved. St. Peter sees for the first time that “God shows no partiality.”

As Peter had to radically change HIS way of thinking, so must WE change OUR way of thinking who is “in” and who is “out.” Peter learned that Jesus’ message of salvation was not intended just for Jews.

It’s hard to break out of a mindset that’s been drilled into you from the time you were a child. Yet for all his faults, and they were plentiful and very public, Peter was also morally resilient. He was able to open his heart to the truth that the Spirit moves in ways beyond our understanding and control. What are you and I being challenged to change in our ways of thinking?

This weekend, we begin this year’s Catholic Services Appeal for 2018. The theme for our appeal is “Opening Doors to Grow with Christ.” Archbishop Allen Vigneron reminds us in his message that we are called to encounter Jesus anew, to grow daily as His disciples, and to give witness to the power of His mercy. Christians seek to be more like Jesus, to treat others as He did, to pray as He prayed to love as He loved, and to honor God in every area of our lives. Growing as His disciples demands that we embrace stewardship as a way of life.

Please read the materials you received in the mail this past week regarding the Catholic Services Appeal. The many ministries, programs, and services funded by the CSA reach out and evangelize in ways individual parishes could not do on their own. We carry out Christ’s ministry of mercy and love not as His slaves, but as His servants. And remember: a gift to the CSA is a gift to St. Martin de Pores Parish.

Knowing that the concepts we give our children about God and God’s ways are likely to hold sway in their hearts over the course of their lifetimes, it pays to make sure we’re conveying an honest and true image of God. Even though we and our children have been privileged to be raised in the Catholic faith, God’s ways are various and mysterious and we must let God be God -- as if we had a choice in the matter! ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:17-23 or 4:1-13 Mark 16:15-20]

This is truly a time of transition. In the Archdiocese, announcements are being made of pastors changing parishes and newer priests receiving their associate pastor assignments. (Don't worry... I'm not going anywhere! I won't fool you on Ascension Sunday like I did on Easter Sunday!) Graduation on the elementary, high school and college levels are taking place, with celebration and sharing memories of years gone by. It is also the season for weddings and priesthood ordinations, and First Communions and Confirmations.

Today's Feast of the Ascension is very much like that. Traditionally, we are told that forty days lapsed between the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His return to the Father in glory. That's why Ascension was celebrated on a Thursday. But for the convenience of working Catholics and the chance to give this feast day the prominence it deserves, it has been moved in most dioceses of our country from Thursday to the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

And what a time of transition this has been for the disciples of Jesus! He is taken up into Heaven. His successor, the First Pope, is a shadow of their former leader. So tentative are the Apostles, so frightened still, that they are coached by Jesus to "stay in Jerusalem" and remain there for nine days until the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Consoler, the Helper, will come to them. This is the first recorded "novena" or 9-day prayer in the Catholic Church!

We've had quite a few funerals here recently. And the common thread that I have seen among all of them is the time for gathering, for remembering, for praying, for grieving, and then for picking ourselves up to continue the Journey of Faith. There is a different spirit when a loved one dies, one that might make us uncomfortable. Because now we are without the comfort of them being with us. After the passing of St. Pope John Paul II, his personal secretary, now Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, was asked, "How are we going to live without him? How is the Church going to survive without him?" Cardinal Dziwisz didn't have to pause long to answer. He said: "Before his death he was greatly limited by the confines

of his body and his health.

Now he can go anywhere around the world and help us a thousand times more effectively than he did in his body!" So can Jesus Christ!

We also see in our three readings the continuity of the arrival of Jesus, the miracles He worked, the message he preached, and the commission of those who knew Him personally and those who would come to know Him after His ascension to the Father. The Good News of the Gospel is that the story doesn't end with Jesus returning to Heaven. That's Part II of a three-part story. You and I make up Part III. "All that Jesus did and taught" now becomes all that you and I must do and teach in order for the Kingdom of God to come to earth, and to remain here until Jesus returns for His Great Curtain Call at the end of time.

What holds us back? Negativity? Fear? Just as Jesus experienced opposition, resistance, misunderstanding and rejection, Jesus promises to continually accompany anyone who responds in faith, trust and abandonment. Jesus may have left us in time and space, but He never leaves our human experience. He lives and works with us here, through the promised Holy Spirit, Whose presence and gift among us we will celebrate next weekend.

Our readings today also remind that us that what goes up must come down! The life of Jesus Christ on this earth had its ups and downs: Down from Heaven in the Incarnation which we celebrate at Christmas. Up on the cross for our salvation on Good Friday. Down in the tomb and to the souls of all humans who died before Him. Up from the tomb on Easter Sunday. Down to earth in the Upper Room. Back up into Heaven on this Feast of the Ascension. He still comes down to us, every time we invite Him here in word and sacrament and in the events of our daily lives. His Last Great Coming Down is yet to be.

In the meantime, we still call upon Him. We still accept the mission to go out to the entire world and proclaim the Good News. We pray in the words of St. Paul: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, give us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in the full and lasting knowledge of Him. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened, that we may know what is the hope that

belongs to His call, our inheritance and the glory of His power.

May we live in a manner worthy of the call we have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another, and preserving unity with the bond of love and peace.

On this Mother's Day, I share with you a "Reflection of a Mother." You will find a copy of it in today's bulletin. I can imagine my Mom saying this to me, but also I can imagine Jesus saying some of these line to this to His Apostles before ascending to the Father in Heaven. It is by an unknown author:

I gave you life, but cannot live it for you.

I can teach you things, but I cannot make you learn.

I can give you directions, but I cannot be there to lead you.

I can allow you freedom, but I cannot account for it.

I can take you to church, but I cannot make you believe.

I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot always decide for you.

I can buy you beautiful clothes, but I cannot make you beautiful inside.

I can offer you advice, but I cannot accept it for you.

I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.

I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.

I can teach you respect, but I cannot force you to show honor.

I can advise you about friends, but cannot choose them for you.

I can advise you about sex, but I cannot keep you pure.

I can tell you the facts of life, but I can't build your reputation.

I can tell you about drink, but I can't say "no" for you.

I can warn you about drugs, but I can't prevent you from using them.

I can tell you about lofty goals, but I can't achieve them for you.

I can teach you about kindness, but I can't force you to be gracious.

I can warn you about sins, but I cannot make you moral.

I can love you as a child, but I cannot place you in God's family.

I can pray for you, but I cannot make you walk with God.

I can teach you about Jesus, but I cannot make Jesus your Lord.

I can tell you how to live, but I cannot give you eternal life.

I can love you with unconditional love all of my life...and I will!

Ascension B (Mother's Day)

SMdP

13 May 18

ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor. 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23]

When was the last time you got really excited about something? Children find such a question easier to answer. They get excited about snow falling. Or an unexpected day off from school. Kids get excited about a test being canceled, a favorite show starting on TV, a grandparent showing up on the doorstep, finding a brightly colored leaf on the sidewalk. Kids are thrilled when the first day of summer finally arrives, when they get to put on their bathing suits, when the bike comes out of the garage and gets dusted off for a new season.

But what thrills an adult like that? Does a bright, sunny day fill us with pleasure? Does a Saturday morning excite us with its possibilities? Do our hearts dance at the sight of someone, anyone? Is there something we yearn to do so much that, when it comes time to do it, we are beside ourselves with joy?

For too many of us, those are hard questions to answer, because the answers may be flat and disappointing. Lots of us might reply that we don't have time to experience those sensations because there are always obligations blocking our view of possibility and hope. Our relationships may be too complicated, tricky, risky, to feel simple pleasure at the sight of those we love.

Of all the places we might look for the vaguest hint of excitement, however, church is probably close to last on too many lists. Admit it. Think of this string of associations: holidays, birthdays, vacations, a raise in pay, a better job, going to church. Which of these things is least likely to inspire excitement?

I hope, for your sake, that our parish is one of the more engaging and vital communities you're involved with, that it's a real source of celebration and life. But in the event that it might not be (even if you're the pastor!) then let's broaden the meaning of church for a minute. Consider the body of believers over 20 centuries who have been living and dying for the Christian Faith. Imagine the experience of the little group who first followed Jesus around for three years, heard him teach, witnessed his miracles, watched him die, stood at the empty tomb, saw him and ate with him again, and viewed his departure. Do you suppose they were excited?

They ran back to a room where they prayed until the Spirit of God filled their house and their minds and hearts until they couldn't contain the experience. So they spilled into the streets and spoke of it to everyone, in every language, with every ounce of their zeal. They were so wildly excited that people thought they were drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning, coming in from an all-nighter someplace, veterans of a pretty long party. That kind of exuberance didn't usually come from the synagogue!

But the energy of this thrilling time didn't end on Pentecost. Paul talks about the driving force of that whole first generation of believers who claimed Jesus as Lord. Their experience was so powerful, it transcended everything else about their lives. It didn't matter anymore if they were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, men or women -- no matter who they were or what they did, horrible sinner or near-saint, this Good News, this Gospel put them in the same relationship to God.

This was unthinkable then, and to many it's unthinkable now. For the lowest, poorest, and rottenest folk, this was the best news they'd ever heard. For those who had been doing quite well and were pleased with their spiritual progress so far, this news was somewhat more jarring, even disappointing. One group naturally got excited about the possibilities that were opening up to them. The other group got equally excited about finding a way to shut this road show down. What if people started believing this wholesale and tried to live as if it were true? This is what we believe and do at St. Martin de Porres Parish!

Here is what we have accomplished together at St. Martin de Porres Parish since Pentecost Sunday of last year, in addition to our regular ministries, services and liturgical celebrations:

Archbishop Allen Vigneron released his pastoral letter, or "letter from the pastor" to all parishes in the Archdiocese of Detroit: "Unleash the Gospel." The parish staff and leadership have been reading and reflecting about the vision the Archbishop has for us, with specific goals and objectives to be put into place.

We will have a two-night workshop in late August to review his letter,

which the Archbishop calls, not HIS letter, but OUR letter, the result of the Synod 2016 which took place two years ago. All Catholics had a part in that gathering.

One off-shoot of the Synod was to have a Festival of Ministries last fall. Dozens of parish organizations, ministries and services were showcased, and 90 people filled out a stewardship commitment sheet to participate in this parish work. Meetings were held to better coordinate our parish events, activities and fund-raising efforts so that our parishioners would not be overwhelmed and suffer from donor fatigue.

The parish has a one-year subscription to FORMED, an internet Catholic information service to help us and the unchurched and fallen-away Catholics to grow in our knowledge of our Catholic Faith and to deepen our spirituality. We hosted Frank Runyeon for our parish mission, which was well-attended and appreciated by our parishioners. Concerts featuring our Minister of Music John McGovern and our Contemporary Music group showed the diversity of prayer through music. I hope to plan an evening of Praise and Worship which will include both of our parish choirs.

Our Divine Mercy Sunday devotion included participation from five parishes. For the last three years, it took place at St. Faustina Church. All five pastors agreed to start rotating the locations of the devotion. I am happy to share with you that next year, it will take place here at St. Martin de Porres.

This past year was a year to celebrate more anniversaries. The Active Christian Women's Club celebrated its 40th anniversary, and Adrian Dominican Sister Noreen O'Connell celebrated her 70th anniversary as a consecrated religious woman and her 90th birthday. The Pope Pius X Council of the Knights of Columbus is preparing to celebrate its 65th anniversary, after having been resurrected four years ago.

Our church interior was enhanced with the addition of an image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, new Offertory collection boxes, and handicap access buttons on one set of our church doors, as well as at the parish center. We are starting construction on a new storage area in the parish center atrium, which will

greatly help out in the storage of our many collections and supplies for the various Christian Service projects.

Speaking of Christian Service, in addition to the many outreach projects we participate in, we hope to develop a service for those who need a ride to church. St. Martin de Porres Parish has established a good reputation for the outstanding outreach we do, thanks to your generosity of time, talent and treasure especially for our holiday collections and with the Warming Center.

We are looking for creative ways to improve attendance at our Eucharistic Adoration opportunities, and are open to ideas for continuing adult faith formation. Our number of those in liturgical ministries continues to decline. We need more ushers, altar servers, lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and choir members.

It is no secret that the demographics of the parishes in Warren are changing. Our older parishioners are becoming more infirmed. For the 70 to 90 members who die each year, there are few replacements. With the loss of membership comes a loss of income, which will impact our budget. On the bright side, our parish leadership is brainstorming for a large, once-a-year fund-raiser which will shore up our parish budget and keep us financially sound. I am asking everyone to prayerfully consider increasing your Sunday offering support, especially if you have not done so recently.

In the area of Christian Faith Formation and Religious education, our children are being brought into a closer relationship with Jesus. Our catechists show enthusiasm and their love of Christ. Retreats are available for catechists, and students and parents preparing for First Eucharist and Confirmation.

We are looking for greater opportunities to reach out to our Faith Formation parents to make the practice of the Faith a higher priority in their lives, as the first and best teachers of faith for their children. This may improve attendance at the Children's Liturgy of the Word, which we offer during the 11:00 AM Sunday Mass.

This year, for adult faith formation, we had an 8-week presentation called, "A Biblical Walk with Mary" and an 8-week Bible study seminar, "Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible" with Jeff Cavens.

We started an adult environmental activity making mats for the homeless from discarded and recycled plastic bags during Lent. And we hosted a community awareness program involving identity theft and other scams.

In the coming year, we hope to improve and expand our youth ministry and to work on better communication and collaboration among us.

Enrollment this past year was 174 students representing 123 families, with three families moving out of the area. 35 students were confirmed, and 11 children received First Eucharist. There were 16 families whose last child completed the program, meaning there are no more children from those families to be in the program next year. There were 10 new families enrolled in the program this year. Sadly, we had no candidates for the RCIA this year – no adult baptisms, Professions of Faith or Confirmation -- but we are working on that for next year.

Two persons were talking together before a large church which was being destroyed by fire. The first man spoke in a voice which could be heard above the voice of the firemen: "This is the first time I ever saw you at church." To this the second responded: "This is the first time I ever saw the church on fire."

It's time for each one of us in this church to be "on fire!" This will only happen when we ourselves encounter God in our hearts and in our lives. The highest form of happiness is union with God. This happens when we are fully human, fully alive, fully open to the Holy Spirit, and as Matthew Kelly puts it, "being the very best version of myself."

This is why Jesus Christ came; this is why He sends the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God will make us one with God. When we open ourselves to receive the Spirit of God, we will be strong enough to inspire and empower others. The Holy Spirit helps sinful people to receive the power of God to repent of their sins. The

Advocate will help us to stand next to God, and be “on fire” and to “Unleash the Gospel” in our parish, in our Archdiocese and in the world!

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

Veni Sancte Spiritus! Come, Holy Spirit! Breathe on us, O Spirit of God!

ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33; Romans 8:14-17; Matt. 28:16-20]

Only the most dedicated Scrooges among us are unwilling to celebrate, anything, period. (Even the bad guys, the Blue Meanies and Darth Vaders and Tolkien Orcs, exult in the results of their destruction!) But most of us have a lower “celebration threshold” than that. Me, I stoop so low as to celebrate dessert; fresh, clean laundry; a handwritten letter from grateful parishioners; losing three or five pounds! Others may demand occasions with more pizzazz. Celebration, however much or little we express it, is vital to our experience of the joy of just being alive. It’s how we demonstrate our gratitude to others, even to God, for being here. If we do not celebrate, do not feel or show or share our gratitude, then we may fall into a false sense of entitlement, even resentment, concerning what is given to us.

The celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity is, as one theologian has described it, “an idea feast.” Unlike Christmas or Easter or your birthday or the Fourth of July, nothing actually “happened” on a particular day to cause this feast. We aren’t celebrating an occasion but a concept. So what’s to celebrate?

Nearly every other day of the Church year is dedicated to some concrete event or some person. There are many feasts for Jesus, for Mary, for the saints, and for signature moments in the Gospel or the life of the Church. We even celebrate the “Chair of Peter,” which is the office of the pope. And the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, which is the “feast day” of a building used as the pope’s cathedral in Rome. But when you study the Church calendar closely, it becomes clear that we have only a single day all year when we celebrate God, simply and purely -- just God in His Divine Self. That’s today.

Today we acknowledge that there is much to cheer about, much to be grateful for, in our relationship with God. The Creator of all things, who is also the Savior and Redeemer, as well as the Spirit and Consolation of the Church, is literally all things to all people. No one and nothing would be here without God. There would be no “here” here. There would be no one around to celebrate anything.

On this day, we celebrate not only the existence of God, but the relationship that God chooses to have with us. God creates, redeems, and sanctifies us. God brought us and everything into being out of love, rescues us from our worst moves and their ultimate consequences, and “makes us holy” -- that is, gives us the grace we need to become more like ourselves, the people we were made to be, in the image of the Holy One. Sin disfigures us. Grace restores us. God is love, as Saint John says, and love constantly calls the beloved to come home and celebrate.

Being human, we naturally get tangled up in the math when it comes to the Trinity. God is Three in One? Actually, to be precise, the Church teaches that God is One in Three, which is a much deeper mystery. Every Swiss Army Knife or Veg-O-Matic appliance beats the concept of three-in-one hands down. But making a multiple out of one is much rarer. No matter how you do the math, there's always more than meets the eye with God.

God is One; that's the great Jewish revelation to Moses, and the Trinity does not seek to replace that concept or to deny it. We see God's "backside" in the divine passing, as Moses once did, catching God in dust and footprints left behind. Creation is one such lovely, breathtaking footprint. The Incarnation of Jesus, in His life, death, and Resurrection, is another overwhelming passage of God. And the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church in you and in me is a third most exhilarating sign that God is present and moving among us. God is **one**: We know this in three ways.

Today's readings remind us of the mission and ministry of Moses and Jesus Christ and us. Today, Moses says farewell on Mt. Nebo as he witnesses the Chosen People migrate to the Promised Land. Jesus gathers His disciples around Him in Galilee before His Ascension with the command to become joyful missionary disciples.

While praying and preparing this homily, the one verse that caught my eye was "they worshiped, but they doubted." DOUBTED?! These disciples were with Jesus for three years. They witnessed dozens of miracles. They saw the Risen Lord defeat death and walk about them. And STILL "they doubted?" OY VEY! But we have to remember that the Greek word for "doubt" is similar to "being on the fence." Not necessarily doubting or giving up on faith. When Jesus walked on water and commanded St. Peter to do the same, Peter was on the side of faith. When he began to falter and sink, he was on the other side of the fence. The same Greek word is used here. And doesn't it speak to our own faith some days? We are "on the fence." Some days our faith is strong, other days not.

We are called to be the modern joyful missionary disciples. "Joyful" means not "happy" but having the peace of Jesus within you." "Missionary" means to be sent to others to proclaim the Good News. The word "disciple" has at its roots, the same word that means "one person walking with another to go somewhere." Isn't that a great definition? You are walking with someone else to go somewhere. To encounter Jesus. To meet Jesus. To follow Jesus. As disciples, we are very special to all of the Holy Trinity! Are you aware of living in a special love relationship with each Person of the Trinity?

Can you sit and chat with God as Father, God as Savior, and God as Holy Spirit? When you're feeling hurt, can you sit in the Father's lap and receive His comfort? When you're fighting temptation, can you feel the strength of Jesus coming to your rescue? When you're worried or confused or struggling to have faith, are you aware of the Holy Spirit's gentle guidance?

The Father of Jesus is our own, very special "Abba" (the childlike Jewish word for "Daddy" in the reading from Romans). We may have been raised with an image of the Father as someone to fear, a punishing authority who barely understands you. No, He gladly adopted you during your baptism, because He's a doting daddy who provides for our needs.

When someone confesses to me being distracted during Mass with preoccupations and thoughts, I give them image of sitting on God the Father's lap in a rocking chair. The Father gently rocks and asks, "What is on your heart, on your mind? Make that a prayer to Me. I care about you." The other person says, "You, sitting on God's lap in a rocking chair?" And I reply, "Yes, it's a big rocker, and God has a very big and strong lap!"

The Holy Spirit assures us, embraces us and comforts us and teaches us everything we need to know so we can live in the joy of a life that's full of love. And in that love, Jesus sacrificed himself for us so that we can be free from the punishment of sin and live holy lives with the help of His Holy Spirit. God is a Holy Trinity of helpers, healers, strengtheners, and faith-builders.

God wants you to live in the fullness of His divinity! God wants you to benefit from all that God is. As baptized Christians and as sacramental Catholics who have God's presence fully available in the Eucharist, we lack nothing that really matters! We lack nothing that really matters. And so, with confidence, we can pray: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. AMEN!

[Readings: Mass for Various Needs, #30 for Peace and Justice]

Memorial Day, as Decoration Day gradually came to be known, originally honored only those lost while fighting in the Civil War. But during World War I the United States found itself embroiled in another major conflict, and the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars.

For decades, Memorial Day continued to be observed on May 30, the date selected for the first Decoration Day. But in 1968 Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which established Memorial Day as the last Monday in May in order to create a three-day weekend for federal employees; the change went into effect in 1971. The same law also declared Memorial Day a federal holiday.

The 20th Century, and even into this century, brought with it wars, seemingly involving every generation, that would give new meaning to the words Supreme Sacrifice. Starting with the Spanish-American War in 1898, American blood was shed on foreign soil in WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and then Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention other far-off places around the world.

Although history has been less than kind in judging the wisdom of our policy-makers in involving us in many of these conflicts, what is beyond dispute is that in every war to which we have sent our young men and women, they have performed with courage and patriotism in the belief that they were serving the best interests of our nation.

For those of us who have been spared the horrors of war, it is difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made on our behalf by those who served -- and died, or returned scarred -- while wearing the uniform.

On this year's Memorial Day, it's appropriate we take a few minutes to remember our priest-veterans.

There are two such priests designated as Servants of God, the first step to being named "Venerable," then "Blessed," and finally, "Saint."

The first is Father Emil Kapaun who served in the Korean conflict. While attending men on the battlefield, he was taken prisoner and endured a 60-mile march to a prison camp. While at the camp, Father Kapaun ignored his own wounds while tending to others. He died of complications from his injuries in 1951. He is one of four priests awarded the Medal of Honor.

The second priest named Servant of God is Father Vincent Capodanno who was known as “the grunt padre” for always being with his troops, especially on the battlefield. In September 1967 he was with a Marine force of 500 in a battle against 2,500 North Vietnamese. Too many times to count, he crisscrossed the battlefield to give first aid and to offer last rites. After having his left arm shredded by a mortar and refusing to leave the battlefield, he gave last rites to a wounded Marine and then covered his body with his own. Father Capodanno was killed. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Also awarded the Medal of Honor, Father Joseph O’Callaghan was a Navy Chaplain aboard the USS Franklin operating near Japan in March 1945. A Japanese pilot struck the ship with two bombs, instantly killing over one thousand men. For the next three days Father O’Callaghan helped rescue injured and trapped sailors, worked as a firefighter, and performed last rites. Father continued his naval career, retiring in 1953 as a Captain.

The fourth priest to receive the Medal of Honor is Father Charles Watters. He was on his second Vietnam tour when his unit attacked Hill 875 in Vietnam. It was a fierce battle, and Father Watters went onto the battlefield retrieving the wounded and offering last rites. He was killed on Nov. 19, 1967, when a bomb struck the battlefield.

Father Tim Vakoc was an Army chaplain serving in Iraq in on May 29, 2004. Returning to his home base after saying Mass at a field station, his vehicle struck a roadside bomb. Father Vakoc was severely injured; he was paralyzed and sustained brain damage as well. He was in a coma for six months but began to show signs of improvement in 2005. Using a computer for limited

communication, he began to speak in 2007. Father Vakoc died as the result of his wounds in 2009.

Perhaps the most inspiring demonstration of the chaplaincy at its best is the story of the “Four Chaplains” -- also called the “Immortal Chaplains.” They were new chaplains, recent graduates in the same class at the Army Chaplain’s School, on board the USS Dorchester headed for Greenland. On Feb. 3, 1943, the ship was struck by a torpedo.

The chaplains -- Methodist minister George Fox, Reform Rabbi Alexander Goode, Father John Washington and Reformed Church in America minister Clark Poling -- organized the orderly evacuation of the ship as well as helped calm the men. They guided the wounded men to safety and helped load the lifeboats.

When there were no more life vests to hand out, the chaplains gave up their own. Once they had helped as many men as possible into the lifeboats, they linked arms, sang and prayed. Survivors said they could hear the mixed languages of the chaplains, including Jewish prayers in Hebrew and Catholic prayers in Latin. Out of the 904 men on the ship, only 230 survived.

It is these, and all, brave Americans, who gave “the last full measure,” whom we honor on Memorial Day. Without their heroic efforts, we would not be gathering here to remember and to pray for them. “No greater love is there than this, to give up one’s life for another.” Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen. May their souls and all the souls of war, violence and terrorism, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN!

Universal Prayer of the Faithful

Priest: Let us pray for our brothers and sisters as they go forth with courage and determination to face the forces of violence, weapons of destruction and hearts filled with hate.

RESPONSE: THROUGH THE DARKNESS BRING US TO THE LIGHT.

Deacon or Reader:

For our President, Congress, Supreme Court and our political and military leaders that they may tirelessly seek peaceful settlements to international disputes; we pray to the Lord:

That the Lord may preserve the members of our Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Air Force from all harm; we pray to the Lord:

That even in war, we may keep clearly before us the defense of all human rights, especially the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; we pray to the Lord:

That the families, relatives and friends of our military members may be strengthened in this time of concern and anxiety; we pray to the Lord:

That the Lord may help families with men and women in the armed forces to cope with daily challenges in the absence of their loved ones; we pray to the Lord:

That our homeland will be preserved from violence and terrorism and that the nations of the world will seek to work together in harmony and peace; we pray to the Lord:

That the hearts of all men and women will be moved to pursue true peace and justice; we pray to the Lord:

That violence may be overcome by peace; that weapons of destruction may be transformed into tools of justice, and that hate may give way to true charity; we pray to the Lord:

That grateful for and inspired by those veterans who have given their lives for our country we may bravely face the challenges ahead, and for all who have died, including those we are remembering at this liturgy; we pray to the Lord:

For the special needs we mention in the silence of our hearts (pause), we pray to the Lord.

Priest: Lord God, Almighty Father,
creator of mankind and author of peace,
as we are ever mindful of the cost paid for the liberty we possess.
We ask you to bless the members of our armed forces.
Give them courage, hope and strength.
May they ever experience your firm support, gentle love and compassionate healing.
Be their power and protector, leading them from darkness to light.
To you be all glory, honor and praise, now and forever.

Amen.