

[Readings: Isaiah 57:13-19; Psalm 85; Colossians 3:12-15; John 14:23-29]

Memorial Day is a day of remembrance for all those who have died in the service of the United States of America either during their military service or as veterans. Memorial Day was borne out of the Civil War, it was officially proclaimed on May 5th, 1868 by General John Logan. Originally, it was known as "Decoration Day", when freed slaves would decorate the graves of Union soldiers, who had given their lives in defense of the principle that no one should enslave another human being. That principle continues to need defending, in light of human trafficking, laws that discriminate, and the clashes between warring factions.

If you have had the opportunity to visit the Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, you had the chance to see all those grave sites of those who have given of themselves to protect our country. I had the honor of visiting my uncle's grave at an American Military Cemetery in France when I was studying in Europe. I also visited the American Military Cemetery near Monte Casino in Italy. What struck me were the rows and rows of thousands of simple white marble crosses lined up like the soldiers they represented. A second impact was that on the same hill of Monte Casino, located in all directions around the base, were the Italian Military Cemetery, the German Military Cemetery and the Polish Military Cemetery. Each with their own national flags, military headstones and losses.

I would like to share with you an editorial written in Our Sunday Visitor, a respected Catholic periodical, a week ago. It makes some good points.

When Catholics in the United States celebrate Memorial Day this year, they will do so in the wake of the quintessential intersection between our religious and civic lives. Our President, Donald Trump, met last week with our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

My comments: the president's visit had what I consider to be a profound itinerary that marks the start of the path to any true and lasting peace.

He began in the Middle East, challenging over 50 Muslim political leaders to remove from their midst all radicals and all terrorists from their religious houses of worship, from their communities and from their countries.

The President then went to Israel, where he met with Jews and Palestinians and spoke of the need for mutual respect and security. He met with Pope Francis, where he commented that more than ever, he is dedicated to seeking and preserving peace in our world. He concluded with a visit to NATO headquarters, where he scolded most of the member countries for not paying their fair share for worldwide military forces and defenses.

Back to the OSV editorial: As citizens, we can be tempted to gawk at an unfolding spectacle of day to day American politics. Conversely, we can be tempted to tune out the stream of oftentimes-surreal information in our media. We can be tempted to apathy, cynicism or even despair. We can be tempted to obsess over every last tweetable detail in real time, turning our political discourse, which has already been warped into a soap opera, into a kind of drug. That comparison alone should indicate this is not a healthy approach.

Turning to the Church, we find a wise reminder of the responsibilities of a person of faith in civic life in the U.S. bishops' "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" document. The bishops note that the Church's teaching has an intrinsically public element:

"At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square."

We have a duty to go into the public square and stay engaged. As for how we do that, this is where Pope Francis' days before the Trump meeting became instructive. The pope spent that time on two resoundingly fruitful foreign trips -- to Egypt in April and Portugal in May.

In Egypt, we saw Pope Francis help bring healing and solidarity in the wake of violence, and to call leaders to overcome old differences and to a deeper

responsibility. In Portugal he reminded us that we are all one, embedded in the providence of a loving God, and looked after by his mother.

The editorial continues: We may not travel with our own plane and the media pool, the world hanging on every word, but Catholics -- and all people of good will -- can live out good citizenship in the public square like Pope Francis does: willing to look at old problems with a fresh perspective, not shying from trouble, vulnerable to being challenged, and calling others to accountability where there is clear injustice, even danger, and remembering that there is always something bigger and more powerful than us. This is what our military personnel fought for, died for, and continue to live for, bearing the scars of war and hatred.

These simple prescriptions require courage to live them out in our current political reality. On this Memorial Day, it becomes clear that the least we can do is strive to consistently live out the values we're free and fortunate enough to have, because those who came before us exercised even greater courage and sacrificed much more to give us those freedoms. To shy away from defense of the common good and solidarity with our neighbors is to squander that sacrifice.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls, the souls of all our beloved military dead, and the souls of survivors of war and violence, through the mercy of God, rest and be at peace. AMEN!

*Many of these comments are taken from a recent editorial in Our Sunday Visitor magazine. Editorial Board: Greg Willits, editorial director; Gretchen R. Crowe, editor-in-chief; Don Clemmer, managing editor*