

[Readings: Acts 1:12-14, Psalm 87:1-3. 5-7; John 19:25-34]

For Catholics, the observance of Memorial Day echoes and combines elements of secular and religious observances half a year away, in November — Veterans Day on Nov. 11, All Saints' Day on Nov. 1 and All Souls' Day on Nov. 2. As in the former, we honor members of our armed forces. As in the Catholic feasts of early November, our focus is on those who have died -- in this case, while serving their country. It is also the Feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, portrayed in today's Gospel as Our Lady of Sorrows.

This is the time when medical technology has driven down the number of war casualties, and such casualties no longer reach indiscriminately into every city block as they would have during conflicts of centuries past, Memorial Day also is an invitation for Americans of all faith backgrounds to step with compassion and gratitude into the suffering of other's people's lives. Look at Ukraine for example.

Families who directly are touched on Memorial Day have made a sacrifice that cuts to their core and is almost unimaginable in the abstract -- the sacrifice of a young person, someone they loved and nurtured at every stage of his or her existence, the sacrifice of the joy and the bright future that life embodied in that family. All of it violently snuffed out. Please stand if you knew someone like this.

Then there are the deeper values and truths undergirding this sacrifice -- the deep love of a country that calls a young person to choose service in the armed forces; the belief that decency, freedom and human rights are worth promoting and defending; the belief that evil really exists in the world and requires us to respond with goodness. These all hold a place in the memories of the people we honor on Memorial Day, and they should inform the hearts of all of us who have the responsibility of living our lives in the peace and freedom for which they sacrificed.

Here the Church has provided a witness on how we can honor these sacrifices, a witness attuned to "signs of the times" that include the destructive capacity of modern weaponry.

Pope St. John XXIII wrote in his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) that “it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice.” His successor, Pope St. Paul VI, put a finer point on it in his famous 1965 address to the United Nations: “War. Never again war!”

Pope Francis echoed Paul’s words in his visit last fall to a U.S. military cemetery in Italy. And in his 2015 address to the U.S. Congress, he pressed the issue of our shared responsibility when he said, “Being at the service of dialogue and peace also means being truly determined to minimize and, in the long term, to end the many armed conflicts throughout our world.”

Working to end conflicts rather than stir them up and to promote true and lasting peace among nations is a daunting task. And while Christians can do much to promote nonviolence in our thoughts and actions toward others, as well as advocate for peace and diplomacy in our world, ultimately it all rises to prayer.

So together this Memorial Day, as we remember with gratitude those who sacrificed their lives, we join in this prayer for Memorial Day (“Catholic Household Blessings and Prayer,” USCCB Publishing):

“God of power and mercy, you destroy war and put down earthly pride. Banish violence from our midst and wipe away our tears. ... Keep in your mercy those men and women who have died in the cause of freedom and bring them safely into your kingdom of justice and peace.”

Mary, Divine Mother and Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for us.

Mary, Our Lady Queen of Peace, pray for us.

*(Taken from a 2022 editorial by the Our Sunday Visitor Editorial Board)*

Taps is a melody used at military funerals. There are no official lyrics to Taps, but the most popular ones are these: “*Day is done, gone the sun, From the hills, from the lakes, from the skies. All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.*” AMEN!