

Patriotism, Baptism, and Burdens... Memorial Day 2017

Yesterday, was a very special day for our family... Our youngest son and his wife presented their daughter... our newest grandchild Evelyn Maria, to God in the sacrament of Baptism. This event was especially noteworthy because of where the baptism took place... St. Martin of Tours Chapel at Fort Lee Virginia. The Priest... Fr. David Kirk has been a wonderful spiritual father to the men and women of the armed services stationed there. He has also touched the heart of my son and daughter-in-law in a special way. And later as we celebrated this event with Fr. Kirk at a family gathering... I was surprised to discover that he attended the same high school I attended. He was a member of the senior class when I was a freshman.

The baptism was conducted during the bases regular Sunday Mass for our service men and women and their families. There have been seven straight weeks where one or more children of those service men and women have been baptized.

I was touched by the reverence and faith displayed by the young men and women in our armed forces. Although I was never in the military myself I admire the faith and trust they must have in their leaders, the politicians, and the president they serve. And most importantly, I was touched by their faith in God. My thoughts turned to several men in this parish, who have served their country proudly, and display the same faithfulness. Two of those men stand out in particular... one is no longer with us. He was my sponsor into the Knights of Columbus. The other has been my mentor in the diaconate, and I have spent many hours with him socially and at our favorite monastery on retreat. He received Joey's oath at his commissioning ceremony for the Army. Both men served this country with distinction.

I can remember many conversations with both of them about what it was like to go to war. Those conversations always concluded with the same sad thoughts... "There is no glory in war. No matter how just the cause may be, war is always horrific, even when you are trying to battle evil and you are on the side of good. To kill another human being is never easy. To hold a fallen comrade in your arms is never easy. There is always a darkness to war."

It is because of the sacrifice of these men and women that we gather today. We remember the sacrifices made by so many for the sake of our freedom. To remember is to make those sacrifices present in our minds and our hearts. So on this day we remember... that there are men and women who have died, so that you and I are able to live with greater freedom, security, justice, and peace.

We honor them because of what they have given...

Honor is a term that is widely misunderstood in our culture as it connotes a kind of self-centered pride focused on one's achievements. Men and women who serve our country understand honor in a very different way. A purer and more sacred way! The full etymology of the word honor is debated. But what seems most likely is that the word honor comes from the Latin word *honor*, which, though translated as "honor," also points to the word "onus," which means "weight" or... something that is heavy. Hence, to "honor"

someone is to appreciate the weight, significance, or burden of something he or she has undertaken. It is to acknowledge that they have carried a great burden well, that they withstood a heavy load, and that what they have done is weighty, and significant.

Our soldiers, police officers, and first responders are deserving of our honor, for they put their lives on the line so that others can live, be more free, and experience abundance.

We cannot and must not discount the burdensome weight that they carry so that we can live as we wish. Freedom is not free; it comes with a price... a price that has consequences. No one understood this more than Christ... For it is certain that the Cross is not only about Love, but also Freedom.

And we must also remember that even though War remains controversial (as it should).

Our soldiers do not create the politics they are sent to address. They are simply told that there is a danger to be addressed, an injustice to be ended, and so they go.

The Love of one's country (patriotism) is rooted in the fourth commandment.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches,

It is the duty of citizens to contribute to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity and freedom. The love and service of one's country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity (CCC # 2239).

In today's Gospel we read the following... **"In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world."**

Jesus never promised his disciples an easy life. He was very clear with them that in the world they would have trouble. It is the same for us. We can't be surprised when opposition and difficulties come our way. It is part and parcel of following Christ and shows that we are heading in the right direction. It is hard to keep fighting... fighting the enemies within and without, but Jesus is with us. We need faith to see that he has won the victory. He has overcome sin and death, and he is there at the right hand of the Father. And all of that has come through the Cross.

As I watched those soldiers take communion yesterday I wondered about and prayed for the tremendous burdens they carry. I thought about the joys of family life with children, birthdays, and baptisms. And I also thought about the uncertainty and trouble that awaits them. Uncertainty and trouble they did not create but willingly accept. I prayed for their safety, and for the presence of mind to remember and cherish the weight of their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice. And I prayed for them to take courage! And for the faith to know that God is with them.

Today as we remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we might be free... we hold them up to the Lord. Let us also ask the Lord to give us a deeper faith in the truth that has been proclaimed in His Son, Jesus Christ. So that we can take courage, and recognize the presence of the Lord in our midst. Most especially in our own trials and sufferings. God bless those who protect us, most especially those who have made that ultimate sacrifice in doing so. And may God Bless America!