
**Homily – Memorial Day & Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother of the Church – Holy Cross Cemetery – May 29, 2023**

Hallowed grounds – like this one – across our country and throughout the world, embrace our loved ones as they await the resurrection when our Lord comes a second time. In this hour we remember all those who have given their lives to defend the truths that this great nation holds – that all men and women are created equal; that we are endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights, to life, liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness.

As we reflect on today's gospel, it seems fitting to place ourselves standing by the cross of Jesus, next to his mother, the other women and John, the Apostle. Worldwide, the Church today celebrates the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. We received her as our mother at the time of the Lord's ultimate sacrifice to witness to the truth about God and his mercy for us. Our life has meaning thanks to God's mercy, fully revealed by Christ in his Paschal Mystery, and poured out on us with his blood. The gift of having the Mother of God as our own mother is part of the mysteries of our salvation. No grace is ever given to the Church and her children which does not come through Mary. There are no words to describe the immense blessing and beauty of Mary, of which we are beneficiaries.

No one who has given up life in defense of values greater than oneself will go unrewarded. The heroes we honor today died, not in their hometowns, but on battlefields, for you and me. We are forever in their debt for the peace and freedom we enjoy, and in which they

believed, defending them at all costs. They laid down their lives for the love of their country. This is one of the greatest acts of self-sacrifice and love one can ever ask for. They were people of great love. As we accompany their loved ones who survived them, we embrace them as our own.

Besides prayer, the ultimate sacrifice made by our heroes in the example of Jesus may be honored as we cherish and uphold that for which they fought. Pope Francis has said: “Building a future of freedom requires love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity. All of us are quite aware of, and deeply worried by, the disturbing social and political situation of the world today. Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and of religion. (...) Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice.”

If there is one thing that sustained those on the battlefields of all the wars ever fought, it was their trust in God. He became their refuge and fortress. So, we ask God today, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, to raise up in joy and new resurrected life all those who have died serving in our Armed Forces.

Finally, we ask Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Church, to help us. Blessed Mother, continue bringing the Church together, as you did after the first Pentecost. Help us remain faithful to the Holy Spirit.