



### **SUNDAY REFLECTION**

The vision of the heavenly Jerusalem and Jesus' promise to the disciples at the Last Supper remind us that our Christian worship is a matter of recognizing God's saving, life-giving presence with us in the Spirit through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Our receiving the flesh and blood of the risen, glorified Jesus in the Mass in the sacrament of a community, family meal, expresses and makes real our life-giving communion with Him and through Him with the Father. All that we must and can do is to recognize, receive and acknowledge this life as the gift, the grace of God. Christian worship is essentially thanksgiving, a eucharist.

**STEWARDSHIP:** Today's reading from Revelation offers a vision of the City of God, the new Jerusalem. "But," the bishops' pastoral on stewardship reminds us, "that 'life to come' is in continuity with this present life through the human goods, the worthy human purposes, which people foster now."

Second Vatican Council *'The Church Today'*

Christ is now at work in the hearts of man through the energy of His Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come, but, by that very fact, He animates, purifies, and strengthens those noble longings too by which the human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal.

### **READINGS FOR THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD**

**2 JUN '19**

**Acts 1:1-11:** This reading describes the Ascension of the Lord and stresses the resulting responsibilities for the faithful who must now continue the mission of spreading the Good News in His name.

**Eph. 1:17-23:** This reading reminds us of the wonder and mystery that now surrounds the glorious position of Jesus at His Father's side and also makes us aware of the power that Jesus exercises on our behalf.

**Heb. 9:24-28; 10:19-23:** By His death and resurrection Jesus has entered the real presence of God, as the unique High Priest of Christians who worship God through and with Him.

**Lk. 24:46-53:** In these closing words of Luke's Gospel, the risen Jesus reminds His followers of the Scriptures which foretold Him, commissions them to be His witnesses, tells them to wait for the Father's gift, and blesses them before ascending into heaven.



## **MEMORIAL DAY:**

Is this a holiday to truly take a bit of time to stop and remember and give thanks or has it degenerated into another opportunity to check out the sales, or to be viewed as a three day kick off for the summer season.

It's so easy to get wrapped up in the fact that this weekend is the unofficial kickoff to summer. Many people will get a few days off from work and just as many are looking forward to a break from the insanity that our jobs sometimes bring to our lives, but Monday is also Memorial Day, a very important day for our country, one deserving of our utmost respect.

According to the National WWII Museum, 80 percent of Americans don't really understand the real reason that we observe Memorial Day. As a matter of fact, only 20 percent of people surveyed said that they know "a lot" about Memorial Day. The other 77 percent said they know "something" or "a little" about the holiday and 3 percent said they knew "nothing" about what Memorial Day is. While 3 percent doesn't seem like a whole lot, it is. Three percent of the American population is roughly 9,858,852 people who don't know what one of the most important United States holidays is.

Just in case you need a refresher, Memorial Day is a federal holiday. It's a day when most businesses close, and all government offices and schools shut down. But more importantly,

Memorial Day is the day on which we pause to honor and remember the men and women who lost their lives while serving in the United States armed forces.

It's easy to forget what Memorial Day actually means while you're sitting by the pool and looking ahead at summer vacation—but the historical reason for the holiday signifies much more than just a three-day weekend.

Memorial Day is a solemn day of remembrance for everyone who has died serving in the American armed forces.

It's unclear exactly where the holiday originated—Charleston, S.C., Waterloo, N.Y., Columbus, Ga. and other towns all claim to be the birthplace of Memorial Day. The event in Charleston that may have precipitated Memorial Day offers poignant evidence of a country struggling to rebuild itself after a bloody war: 257 Union soldiers died in prison in Charleston during the Civil War and were buried in unmarked graves, and the town's black residents organized a May Day ceremony in which they landscaped a burial ground to properly honor the soldiers.

In the years following the Civil War, Memorial Day celebrations were scattered and, perhaps unsurprisingly, took root differently in the North and South. It wasn't until after World War II that the holiday gained a strong following and national identity, and it wasn't officially named Memorial Day until 1967, before that it was known as Decoration Day.

The final event that cemented the modern culture of Memorial Day in America was in 1968 when Congress passed the Uniform Holiday Act, designating Memorial Day as the last Monday in May rather than May 30, as it had previously been observed. This ensured a three-day weekend and gave the day its current status as the unofficial beginning of summer, mixing serious reflection with more lighthearted fun.

While this national holiday may be seen by some as the unofficial start of the summer season, all Americans must take a moment to remember the sacrifice of our military service members, first responders and their families. Memorial Day is a day of both celebration and grief, accounting for the honor of those who have defended and protected us and reflecting on their tragic loss.

“Here at the Capitol, just weeks before the end of the Civil War, a weary President Lincoln pleaded with his fellow citizens, to ‘bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.’”

Gen. Colin Powell, USA (Ret)

Civil War soldiers had been mustered from towns and villages across the land. Like today, the loss of each soldier was a profound tragedy for both family and community.

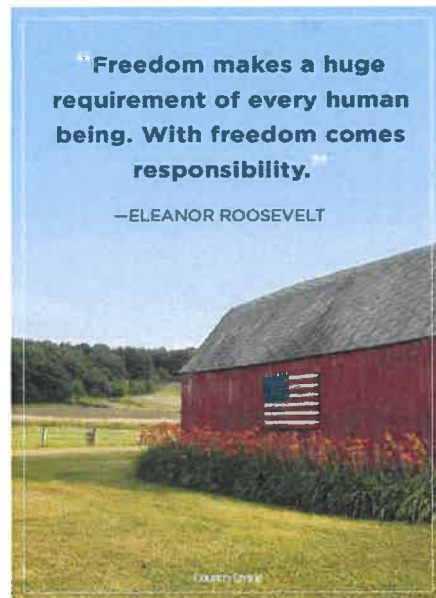
Today, we honor service members from all of America's past wars. It is also an appropriate time to remember our First Responders who patrol our neighborhoods. But there is immediacy in our sorrow; the wounds of war and violence are new again. As we struggle for ways to heal, Abraham Lincoln's message of over 150 years ago can still inspire us.

This, then, is the mission of Memorial Day: to reach out in support of all those and their families who have sacrificed so much for us.

Throughout America's history, hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens have died bravely serving our country. The number of battle deaths alone speak to the sacrifices these men and women and their families have made.

### Fatalities from U.S. Wars and Conflicts

<b>American Revolution (1775-1783)</b>	4,435
<b>War of 1812 (1812-1815)</b>	2,260
<b>Mexican War (1846-1848)</b>	13,283
<b>Civil War (1861-1865)</b>	620,000
<b>Spanish-American War (1898-1902)</b>	385
<b>World War I (1917-1918)</b>	116,516
<b>World War II (1941-1945)</b>	405,399
<b>Korean War (1950-1953)</b>	36,574
<b>Vietnam War (1964-1975)</b>	58,220
<b>Gulf War (1990-1991)</b>	383
<b>Afghanistan War (2001-present)</b>	2,381
<b>Iraq War (2003-2012)</b>	4,500



## CONFIRMATION Cont.

### Origins

We do not know exactly when, during His public life, Jesus instituted the sacrament of Confirmation. This is one of the “many other things that Jesus did” which, as St. John tells us, are not written down in the Gospels (see John 21:25).

We know that Catholic Tradition (the teachings of the Church which have been handed down to us from our Lord, or from His Apostles inspired by the Holy Spirit) is of equal authority with

Sacred Scripture as a source of divine truth. If a "Bible-only" friend thrusts out his jaw and says, "Show it to me in the Bible; I don't believe it unless it's in the Bible," we do not fall into that trap. We answer sweetly by saying: "Show me in the Bible where it says that we must believe only what is written there."

However, it does happen that the Bible tells us about Confirmation. Not under that name, of course. Aside from Baptism, our present names for the sacraments were developed by the early theologians of the Church; "Laying on of hands" was the earliest name for Confirmation. This is the name which the Bible uses in the following passage taken from the Acts of the Apostles:

"Now when the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent to them Peter and John. On their arrival they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for as yet He had not come upon any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. But when Simon (the magician) saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the Apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give Me also this power, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 8:14-19)

It is from this passage, and the attempt of the magician Simon to buy the power to give Confirmation, that we get the word "simony" – the name given to the sin of buying and selling sacred things. That, however, is a very minor point.

The real significance of this passage lies in what it tells us about the sacrament of Confirmation. It tells us that while Confirmation is a complement to Baptism, a completing of what was begun in Baptism, nevertheless Confirmation is a sacrament distinct from Baptism.

- The Samaritans already had been baptized, yet it still was necessary for them to receive the "laying on of hands."
- The passage also tells us the way in which Confirmation was to be given: by the placing of the hand of the one who confirms, upon the head of the one to be confirmed, with a prayer that he may receive the Holy Spirit.

We are particularly interested in this fact which the passage makes plain: the fact that it was the Apostles—that is, the bishops—who did the confirming. Whoever it was who had baptized the Samaritans very evidently did not have the power to "lay hands" upon them and to impart to them the Holy Spirit. Two of the Apostles, Peter and John, had to travel from Jerusalem to Samaria in order to give the sacrament of Confirmation to these new Christians.

The bishop was the original minister of Confirmation. Ordinarily, the bishop still administers this sacrament so that there is a clear link to the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. However bishops can also permit priests to administer this sacrament, and in practice this is often done.

### **The rite of Confirmation**

The essential part of the Confirmation rite is when the bishop or priest places his hand upon the head of each individual.

The bishop traces the sign of the cross on the person's forehead—having first dipped his thumb in the holy oil called *chrism*—and says, “Be sealed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.” The newly confirmed person responds by saying, “Amen.”

Chrism is one of the three kinds of holy oil which a bishop blesses each year at his Mass on Holy Thursday. The other two kinds of holy oil are the oil of catechumens (used in Baptism) and the oil of the sick (used in Anointing of the Sick). The holy oils, all of them, are composed of pure olive oil.

From ancient times, olive oil has been looked upon as a strengthening substance; so much so that athletes were accustomed to bathe in olive oil before taking part in athletic contests. The significance of the holy oils used in the administration of the sacraments is then very evident: the oil represents the strengthening effect of God's grace.

Besides the distinct and special blessing which each holy oil receives, chrism has another difference: balm has been mixed with it. Balm is a fragrant substance procured from the balsam tree. In the holy chrism it symbolizes the “sweet odor” of virtue; it tells of the spiritual fragrance, the *attractiveness* that should characterize the life of him who puts his Confirmation graces to work.

The cross which is traced upon the forehead of the person being confirmed is a powerful symbol if it is really understood and acted upon.

It is quite easy to know whether I do understand and act accordingly. I have only to ask myself:

- “Do I actually live as though there were a visible cross branded on my forehead, marking me as ‘Christ’s man’ or ‘Christ’s woman’?”
- “In my daily life, do I really bear witness to Christ?”
- “By my attitude towards others, by my treatment of those around me, by my actions in general do I proclaim: ‘This is what it means to be a Christian; this is what it means to live by the Gospel’?”

If the answer is no, then it means that there is a lot of grace being wasted—the special grace of Confirmation. It is a grace which is available to me in abundance if I will but use it.

Its strengthening grace will enable me to overcome my human pettiness, my cowardice in the face of human opinion, my fearfulness of sacrifice.

Strength to live in the world

In Confirmation, the bishop or priest places his hand upon our head and calls down upon us the Holy Spirit Who can, if we will let Him, transform our lives.

Without Baptism we cannot go to heaven. Without Confirmation we can get to heaven, but the going will be much rougher.

In fact, without Confirmation it would be easy to lose our way entirely, easy to lose our faith.

That is why it is of obligation for every baptized person to be also confirmed if he has the opportunity of receiving the sacrament of Confirmation.

We know that Jesus did not institute any of the sacraments “just for the fun of it.” Jesus instituted each individual sacrament because He foresaw, in His infinite wisdom, that we would have need of certain special graces under certain particular circumstances.

He foresaw, among other things, the dangers to which our faith would be exposed. Some of the dangers would be from within, as when passion or self-will wars with belief. Sometimes the dangers to our faith are from without.

In all of these circumstances, the grace of Confirmation comes to our aid (if we will let it) and irresistibly pushes back the urgings of self-will, helps us to preserve our sense of values, and keep us on an even keel so that faith may triumph. The peace we find then is a real peace.

## **ALTAR Cont.**

Several weeks ago, during the Season of Lent I started a discussion on the altar and had to step away from it due to other subjects pertaining to Lent and Easter that I thought needed to be covered. The following is a brief synopsis of what was previously covered and then the continuation of the historical development and the meaning of the altar in a Catholic church.

The altar is the structure upon which the [Eucharist](#) is celebrated.

The altar, centrally located in the [sanctuary](#), is to be the focus of attention in the church.<sup>[2]</sup> At the beginning of the [Roman Rite of Mass](#), the priest first of all reverences the altar with a kiss and only after that goes to the chair at which he presides over the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word.

The rite of dedication of a church includes that of the altar of the church and celebration of Mass on that altar is "the principal and the most ancient part of the whole rite" in accordance with the saying of the [Fathers of the Church](#): "This altar should be an object of awe: by nature it is stone, but it is made holy when it receives the body of Christ.

In the Old Testament, the altar is presented as a small mound of stones upon which the flesh of sacrificed animals could be roasted (Gen. 8:20). In Ex. 20:24, the commandment to offer sacrifices to God upon an altar is given at the same time the Ten Commandments are delivered. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were ordered to tear down the altars of the Canaanites, to destroy their cult (Ex. 34:13).

The English word "altar" translates two Greek terms, *bomos*, the altar of non-Christian cults, and *thusiasterion*, the altar of God. The distinction originated in the Septuagint where the *bomos* of idols is contrasted to *thusiasterion* of Israel's God, God commanded that the altars of the cults of false gods be destroyed (Amos 7:9). Again, in Judg. 6:25, Gideon is told to destroy his father's altar to Baal and to erect "an altar to the Lord ... in proper order."

The altars of false gods are ordered to be struck down, as in Judg. 6:25. The altar is a place for God's people to gather, as in Joel 2:17. Ps. 26:6 makes the altar the location of God's forgiveness and mercy. In 1 Kgs. 13:2, it is the place where God's word is preached, even when that word is a prophecy against Temple authorities.

In the New Testament, the attitude of Jesus to the Temple cult is unclear. According to the Gospels He never repudiated the ritual worship of His Jewish contemporaries. During the "cleansing of the Temple" (Mt. 21:12-13; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-48; Jn. 2:14-17) Jesus affirmed the Temple as a "house of prayer," even as He condemned the unjust business practices of the Temple merchants.

Much Christian typology of the altar derives from the book of Revelation. The altar of the heavenly liturgy symbolizes the place of the sacrifice of the Lamb. When the angel offer incense upon the altar, the prayers of God's people are said to ascend (Rev. 8:3). The altar is the place where the sacrifices of the martyrs are conjoined to the sacrifice of Christ: "I saw

under the altar the souls of those that who had been slaughtered for the word of God" (Rev. 6:9).

Next week Church History regarding the altar.

### **PASTOR'S UP-COMING SCHEDULE**

- Saturday 25 May 8:30 a.m. Mass  
Prayer Garden Service for Memorial Day 9:00 a.m.  
Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.  
Vigil Mass of Sixth Sunday of Easter 5:00 p.m.
- Sunday 26 May Masses Sixth Sunday of Easter  
7:00 a.m. 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m.  
Brig 7:30 p.m.
- Monday 27 May **Memorial Day Offices closed**  
**Memorial Day Mass 8:30 a.m. Held in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Cemetery**  
Brig 7:40 p.m.
- Tuesday 28 May Mass 8:30 a.m.  
Mass Georgian Manor 10:30 a.m.
- Wednesday 29 May Mass 6:30 a.m.  
Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m.  
Mass 8:30 a.m.  
PCRS Mass 10:00 a.m.  
Mass Indian Creek Correctional Facility 6:00 p.m. ....
- Thursday 30 May Mass 8:30 a.m.  
Confessions 5:00 -6:30 p.m.  
Mass 6:30 p.m.
- Friday 31 May Mass 8:30 a.m.  
**Quiet Adoration & Reflection 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
- Saturday 1 June Mass 8:30 a.m.  
Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.  
**Vigil Mass Ascension of our Lord 5:00 p.m.**
- Sunday 2 June **Ascension of Our Lord**  
**Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m.**  
Brig Mass 7:30 p.m.
- Monday 3 June Pastor's Day Off  
Brig 7:40 p.m.

Elie Wiesel

"Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory there would be no civilization, no future.



## *St. Stephen, Martyr, Roman Catholic Church*

21 May 2019

Parishioners of St. Stephen, Martyr

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Any of my words or phrases are hardly adequate in expressing gratitude for the celebration of my twenty-fifth Anniversary last Sunday.

Many of you in attendance asked if I knew about what was going to take place. No, once again I was pretty much clueless. What a deceptive lot! I knew that we were going to have a "simple" pot luck picnic. Does this parish ever do anything simply? If so I have not experienced it. You all go for the gold with enthusiasm each and every time. Sunday was no exception. The picnic – yes I knew about that; but, everything else, not a glimmer. You overwhelmed, floored me with the envelope in the Christmas tree. I could not imagine why a Christmas tree was being brought into the church. Then when it was turned around and I saw the envelope I realized that this was the first time a sermon of mine had been turned back on me. The story behind the envelope is one that I have used in past Christmases, but not here because I know I won't get through it. You all pull my emotional strings so I have not had the nerve. But I had apparently mentioned it in passing and you picked up on it. The entire story is printed on the back of this letter.

Your gift of a donation to Allegheny College, my undergraduate alma mater could not have been more perfect. As I said on Sunday, I wonder what the first thoughts were in the development office of that Methodist college upon receiving donations from a Catholic parish. Those four years spent in Meadville, immersed in the attitude and atmosphere that in retrospect I now recognize as having characterized Allegheny in the classroom as well as beyond encouraged the free exchange of ideas, acquisition of knowledge and the development of interests and talents have been critically instrumental in pursuing the various paths that I have taken over the years that have in turn brought me to this point in life. I can never fully express my appreciation for your generosity that in a sense validated this life long process.

These past nine years, roughly 36 percent of my priesthood if the math is correct have been extraordinary and I have not regretted a moment since arriving. Much has been accomplished through your commitment, support, generosity and encouragement, for this I am deeply indebted. For the past years and to all of you who planned, executed, contributed in so many ways and celebrated with me, please accept my deepest heart felt appreciation.



## THE CHRISTMAS ENVELOPE

It's just a small, white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past ten years or so. It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas. Oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it – overspending, the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and the dusting powder for Grandma – the gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else. Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties and so forth. I wanted something special just for Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was twelve that year, was wrestling at the school he attended. Shortly before Christmas, there was a no-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. The youngsters on this team, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and spanking new wrestling shoes. As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, the light helmets designed to protect a wrestler's ears. It was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford.

Well, we ended up walloping them. We took every weight class. But as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn't acknowledge defeat. Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly. "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." Mike loved kids – all kids – and he knew them well, having coached little league football, baseball, and lacrosse.

That's when the idea for its present came. That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve, I placed an envelope on the tree, with a note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years. For each Christmas I followed the tradition, one year sending a group of retarded youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground a week before Christmas, and on and on.

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning, and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents. As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure.

The story doesn't end there. You see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was so wrapped up in grief that I barely put the tree up.

But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning it was joined by three more. Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition had grown, and someday it will expand even further, as our grandchildren stand around the tree, wide-eyed with anticipation, watching as their fathers take down the envelope. Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us.