

MEMORIAL DAY RETREAT REMEMBERING THOSE WHO SERVE

GETTING STARTED

Take a few moments to appreciate the rights and freedoms that are important to you:

- ★ *Drive or walk around your town paying special attention to the police and fire stations, flags waving, and memorial ribbons for soldiers serving abroad*
- ★ *Reflect on having the right to vote, practice your own religion, and gain an education*
- ★ *Finally, remember that women and men have given their lives to defend these rights and freedoms*

Now, settle into the moment...

- ★ *Find a silent or peaceful place*
- ★ *Close your eyes and breathe deeply*
- ★ *Recognize that God is with you*

PRAYER

Loving God, Jesus told us, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*John 15:13*). At times we take for granted the peace and freedoms afforded us through the sacrifices that soldiers, police officers, firefighters, and others before us have made. We do not always appreciate the privileges and comforts that others provide us. And more intimately, sometimes our own self-interest can become more important to us than loving and caring for our friends. Help us to be more mindful of the sacrifices that others have made for our own well-being and the ways we might give of ourselves for the good of others. Amen.

What freedoms and rights do you take for granted? Dear Lord, I am sorry for the times that I...

READING: Wisdom: 3:1-9

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,
and their going from us to be their destruction;
but they are at peace.
For though in the sight of others they were punished,
their hope is full of immortality.
Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great
good,
because God tested them and found them worthy of
himself;

like gold in the furnace he tried them,
and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.
In the time of their visitation they will shine forth,
and will run like sparks through the stubble.
They will govern nations and rule over peoples,
and the Lord will reign over them forever.
Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,
and he watches over his elect.

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THOUGHTS ON THE READING

The reading from Wisdom, typically read at the funerals of the admired and inspiring, shows that God has neither overlooked the struggle of the brave women and men who have given their lives in defense of the freedoms we hold so dearly, nor their sacrifices for righteousness. We live in hope that our sisters and brothers now rest in the arms of the Lord, enjoying the peace, justice, and freedom that they fought so hard for us to enjoy. Memorial Day is an opportunity for our nation to remember, pray for, and mourn the loss of these women and men. We gather together in cemeteries, at flagpoles, on town greens, as well as in our churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues to pray, each in our own way, for the soldiers, police officers, and firefighters who have died in the line of duty. Encouraged by the hope of their eternal reward in the hands of God, we unite our prayers with those from all faith traditions as our whole nation prays in thanksgiving for the great sacrifice of the women and men upon whose shoulders we now stand, who have truly shown us all the greatest sort of love.

REFLECTING ON THE READING

Take a few moments to think about (or even write down) your responses to the following:

- ★ *Who do you know who serves her/his country as a soldier, police officer, or firefighter? How might you thank her/his for that service?*
- ★ *When you remember those who lost their lives defending our rights and freedoms, what does their legacy and sacrifice mean to you?*
- ★ *Name three ways you can more joyfully recall the memory of your friends and family who have died.*
- ★ *In what ways do you feel moved to help others? How might you become a servant to others in your community?*

PRAYING FOR THE COMMUNITY

Adding our prayers to those across the nation, from a multitude of traditions, we give thanks for those who defend and care for us. Christ, we thank you for your saving sacrifice through which you welcome our fallen guardians into your kingdom. God, give us loving hearts so that we too may give of ourselves for others. Holy Spirit, bless all who serve and protect us. *Add your own petitions perhaps for soldiers, police officers, and firefighters in your community: Christ, thank you... Father, give... Holy Spirit, bless...*

MAKE A COMMITMENT TO THOSE WHO SERVE OTHERS

Using your reflection responses as a guide, make a doable personal commitment that will help you to be more appreciative of those who put their lives on the line in service to our country. *Ideas: Call or even visit your local police or fire station to thank the women and men there for their service. Invite a neighbor over for dinner who has a family member serving abroad with the military. Volunteer your time at a local veterans center or medical facility.*

CONCLUSION

Christ, you taught us saying, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” ([Matthew 5:9](#)). We mourn the deaths of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in pursuit of peace. Still, we know that you gave your own life so that these women and men can find eternal peace in your kingdom. May we learn, through their example, to appreciate the joys of peace and freedom that we may sometimes take for granted. Amen.