



Priest. Soldier. POW. Medal of Honor Recipient.

Have you heard of the exploits of Army Chaplain (Capt.) Emil Joseph Kapaun?

Today in the United States, we honor the soldiers who died fighting for our freedom.

Chaplain Emil Joseph Kapaun is one of many soldiers who laid down their lives for us Americans. He did so while ministering to thousands of American GIs when he served as a Catholic priest for the Army during World War II and the Korean War.



Born April 20, 1916, on a farm in Kansas, Emil was ordained for the Diocese of Wichita in Kansas in 1940. In 1943, he was appointed auxiliary chaplain at the Herington Army Airfield in Kansas.

The following year, Fr. Kapaun became a military chaplain at Camp Wheeler in Georgia, where he and another priest ministered to 19,000 soldiers. He was then sent to India and would sometimes travel nearly 2,000 miles to reach soldiers and local missions across the Burma Theater. He was promoted to the rank of Captain in January 1946.



He quickly earned a reputation for being a fearless soldier who risked his life to minister to the men fighting on the front lines.

Fr. Kapaun also served in the Korean War in the 1950s. As a chaplain in the 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, he poured heart, soul, and strength into caring for the spiritual, mental, and physical welfare of his fellow soldiers.

While in Korea, he was honored for rescuing the wounded and administering Last Rites to the dying. He offered the Holy Mass, performed baptisms, heard confessions, and gave Holy Communion. In his letters to family and friends, Fr. Kapaun expressed conviction that everyone's prayers helped him survive.



At one time, Kapaun and his assistant learned of a wounded soldier stranded in the middle of enemy fire. They immediately went out to rescue him and saved the soldier's life. This courageous act earned Fr. Kapaun the Bronze Star Medal: "With total disregard for personal safety, Chaplain Kapaun and his companion went after the wounded man...The entire route to the wounded soldier was under intense enemy machine gun and small arms fire. However, Chaplain Kapaun successfully evacuated the soldier" (Bronze Star Award description).

When the Chinese People's Volunteer Army invaded at the Battle of Unsan, Fr. Kapaun braved enemy gunfire again and rescued nearly forty soldiers—for which he received the Medal of Honor in 2012, over sixty years after his death. The Chinese then captured him (he had a chance to escape and did not take it, preferring to stay with his men) and several other American soldiers, sending them to a prisoner of war camp. Although many died each day from disease, malnutrition, and horrific conditions, Fr. Kapaun refused to despair. He continued to minister to the POWs, shared his food with them, and gave them the will to live and persevere.

While in the POW camp, Fr. Kapaun contracted pneumonia and developed a blood clot in one of his legs. He grew weaker daily, but still held a forbidden service on Easter Sunday in 1951 in defiance of the Communist captors.

Chaplain Emil Joseph Kapaun died on May 23, 1951, one of twelve American chaplains to die in Korea. Pope St. John Paul II named him a Servant of God in 1993, the first step in the process of canonization.

Fr. Emil Kapaun, pray for us!

Catholic gifts for the Armed Forces help bring peace and comfort to those who follow Fr. Kapaun's example and serve our country in faraway places. These bestselling Catholic gifts provide spiritual protection for our military and serve as a reminder for civilians to pray for our service members! [Check out special medals, rosaries, and other bestselling Catholic gifts to say "thank you" to a loved one fighting for our freedom here!](#)