



# The Ascension of the Lord

May 28, 2017

## Readings

*This week:*

Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20

*Next week:*

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23

## Psalm

God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord. (*Psalm 47*)

## Today

Today's presider is Fr. Kevin Ballard.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. Members of the Thomas Merton community plan these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to "full, active and conscious participation" in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate by check or cash, every Sunday there is a donation basket in the back of church or by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope in the bulletin the last Sunday of every month to mail your donation. Please do not put your TMC donation in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).

## Calendar

No meetings this week.

## From Thomas Merton

Our vocation is not simply to *be*, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny. We are free beings and children of God. This means to say that we should not passively exist, but actively participate in His creative freedom, in our own lives, and in the lives of others, by choosing the truth. To put it better, we are even called to share with God the work of *creating* the truth of our identity. . . . To work out our own identity with God. . . is a labor that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears. It demands close attention to reality at every moment, and great fidelity to God as He reveals Himself, obscurely, in the mystery of each new situation. . . . *The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God's will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity.* To refuse them is to refuse everything; it is the refusal of my own existence and being: of my identity, my very self.

—*New Seeds of Contemplation*

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy; to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality; and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

# COMMUNITY NOTES

*News Announcements Requests*

## **Remember original meaning of Memorial Day:**

*By Rev. Marianne Nichols, pastor of Charlottesville United Methodist Church in Greenfield, SC. Published May 20, 2017, at [www.greenfieldreporter.com](http://www.greenfieldreporter.com).*

*I thank my God for every remembrance of you...  
—Philippians 1:3*

Memorial Day, once called Decoration Day, became a national holiday after the Civil War, when so many sought to honor the dead in both the North and the South from that horrible conflict. More than 600,000 soldiers died in the Civil War. Often families and friends would gather in small cemeteries, where they would decorate the graves of their soldiers and enjoy a meal afterward. The holiday was named Decoration Day and remained so [until 1967 when] the holiday became known as Memorial Day ... a time of not only decorating the graves of war dead, but a time of remembering their courageous acts and the giving of their lives as the ultimate sacrifice for their fellow man.

On Memorial Day, the flag is raised to full-staff and then lowered to half-staff until noon. The half-staff position remembers the soldiers who have given their lives in the service of their country. At noon, the flag is raised to full-staff, where it remains the rest of the day. This is symbolic of raising the memories of the dead, and the resolve of the people that these brave soldiers shall not have died in vain, that the people resolve to continue the fight for liberty and justice for all.

Psalm 27:3-4 reads, "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. One thing I ask from the Lord,

## **Next Sunday is Pentecost:**

Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday. If you have an article of clothing that is red, please wear it next week!



## **STA "fluff up the garden" on June 20:**

There will be a "fluff up the garden" party here at St. Thomas Aquinas on Saturday, June 10, beginning at 10:00 am.. Many hands would make light work, so if you can spare an hour (or two), please come help us with new planting and weeding, as we spruce up the garden around the church for Spring.

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this only do I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." It's not just about the food and the fun ... it's about honor, remembrance, liberty and justice.

# COMMUNITY FORUM

*Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns*

## **The real meaning of Memorial Day:**

*By Chase Wickersham, U.S. Army Veteran, Vietnam and Director, Goodwill of Orange County's Tierney Center for Veteran Services, May 20, 2017, at [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).*

Memorial Day has become a company holiday, an excuse for a three-day weekend, an opportunity for retail sales promotions and the beginning of the summer season. We have forgotten what it is all about. Unfortunately, with less than 1% of the population in the military and the total number of veterans shrinking every day as we lose our greatest generation of World War II veterans, the general population doesn't have a personal connection to Memorial Day.

Memorial Day was started after the Civil War when, because of the horrific number of casualties, most of the country had experienced a loss of a family member or a friend during the fighting. In 1967, Memorial Day was officially declared a national holiday during the Vietnam War. We honor on this day the men and women who have died while serving in the U.S. military.

For those of us who have served in combat, Memorial Day has special meaning. Combat changes a person, and you never forget the men around you who did not make it home. Sometimes, when memory gets foggy, you may

## **CRS opposes proposed cuts to foreign aid:**

*Abridged from an article by Nikki Gamer, March 16, 2017, at [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org), March 16, 2017. CRS is the official international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community.*

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is deeply troubled by the proposed draconian cuts to poverty-focused foreign assistance in the administration's budget request. At a time of both increased need in the world and genuine progress against poverty, such cuts to the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development would have devastating and long-lasting effects, both around the world and here in the United States. "The proposed reduction in foreign aid, by almost a third, would set us back decades," said Bill O'Keefe, vice president for government relations and advocacy at CRS. "Lives depend on it," he continued, "and our country's future depends on it as well. We can either help the poor and vulnerable develop and govern themselves—as we have been doing successfully—or we will be forced to confront these problems when they arrive on our shores—whether in the form of disease, violence or migration."

The proposed cuts come at a time when more people have been forced from their homes by war, poverty and climate change than ever before. Some 65 million people have been forcibly displaced—including more than 13 million Syrians, almost 5 million refugees who have fled to other countries.

... "Foreign aid works," O'Keefe added, noting that it was instrumental in keeping the 2014 outbreak of Ebola in West Africa from spreading to our country and has helped to nearly eliminate malaria in various parts of the world. . . . U.S.-government funded programs overseas strengthen families and communities, and support local health and social systems. Over the decades, these investments have helped many developing countries become full-fledged members of the world economy. . . . Any cuts to foreign aid jeopardize U.S. security, creating a vacuum in fragile states that can be exploited by our nation's enemies, leading to the need for much more costly—in money and lives—military intervention, O'Keefe said.

CRS Board Chairman Bishop Gregory J. Mansour joined more than 100 faith leaders urging Congressional leadership to protect international lifesaving humanitarian assistance and poverty-focused development programs.

... "As followers of Christ, it is our moral responsibility [...] to support and protect the International Affairs Budget, and avoid disproportionate cuts to [...] vital programs."

"Americans are generous," O'Keefe said. "This very small part of the federal budget is tax dollars well spent.



## **Save bodies, not just souls:**

*By Alice Camille at [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org), May 19, 2016. Camille is the author of Working Toward Sainthood (Twenty-Third Publications) and other titles available at [www.alicecamille.com](http://www.alicecamille.com).*

... How do you feel about your body? If that question seems out of place for a discussion of the Bible, then it's possible we've missed something. Because if ever there was a religion that respected the human body, it's Judaism. And if ever God showed personal interest in what becomes of bodies and the people who inhabit them, it's in the ministry of Jesus.

But before going further, I have to admit that Christianity has a bad reputation for being body-negative. . . . It's important, however, to balance those notions with some heavy-hitting doctrines that say otherwise. Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, Assumption, and Eucharist are all body-affirming teachings that are central to our faith. God does not discard mortal flesh like a garment but retains and even glorifies it for eternity. When we talk about salvation, we say the whole person is saved. The body is deemed worth saving, too. Those are all staggeringly positive statements about our physical nature that must not be overlooked or contradicted.

... That a body might be restored after death, however, was a relatively late idea in Jewish thought.

... The Pharisees of Jesus' generation strenuously argued for the existence of an afterlife, while Sadducees just as strongly disagreed. But the debate about what happens to the just one after death got a big boost from the Christian community's insistence on the bodily Resurrection of Jesus. Paul put the matter simply: If Christ is not raised, our faith is in vain.

The witness of the apostles was not simply a testimony to the miracles and teachings of Jesus, but to his resurrected life first and foremost. Paul keeps a careful log of who saw Jesus with their own eyes after Easter (1 Cor. 15). The gospel writers demonstrated the physical reality of the Risen Lord by insisting that he ate and drank with his friends after death. Even his familiar wounds could be touched.

The Ascension of Jesus is a vital finish to the story of God-with-us that began with Incarnation. Jesus doesn't just disappear like a ghost. He has to exit the scene with his body, which so uniquely operates as the intersection between heaven and earth. And Jesus leaves with us a meal of his flesh and blood that contains the seeds of our own immortality.

These bodies of ours that fill us with both wonder and shame, that carry the conflict of pleasure and pain, and register the rise and decline of our vigor, matter a great deal to the One who fashioned and redeemed them. . . .

## *The real meaning of Memorial Day, continued:*

forget what someone looked like or maybe a complete name, but the ones closest to you are always there. Memorial Day forces us to remember them and their sacrifice.

I remember one person, Ronald Natalie. He was a 21-year-old supply clerk who was stationed with me at battery headquarters in Pleiku, Vietnam. I was the executive officer in the battery, and he was a SP4 and one of the enlisted in the HQ platoon. I don't remember if he was drafted or volunteered. He was a pleasant man from the Midwest—Monroe, Michigan, I believe, and he had many friends. I never had a close relationship with Natalie but saw him often during daily operations.

What I remember vividly is his last day before the ambush. Natalie came to me and asked for permission to go to a distant fire base by Jeep to say goodbye to some of his friends. I thought it was a bad idea with less than two weeks to go before he shipped home, but I could not dissuade him from going so I insisted that he take our most experienced combat soldier, our motor pool sergeant, who was on his third tour in Vietnam and was maybe 22 years old. I remember telling them to stay alert, stay sober and don't get on the highway late. If you leave late, you might miss the road-clearing detail that sweeps the highway for stragglers or broken equipment before dark. After that sweep, "Charlie" or the Viet Cong, owns the road. Unfortunately, they left late, and traveling fast hoped to catch up with the sweeper gunships.

At about 5 pm, I received a call that my Jeep was involved in an ambush about 20 miles south of Pleiku, and an infantry unit from the 4th Division was heading out in choppers to find a missing GI who was blown out of a Jeep during the ambush. I asked if we should organize a rescue effort by road and was told to wait at the Pleiku hospital for details. I organized two vehicles to transport us out of Artillery Hill, where the battery was located across the town to the hospital on the other side. We arrived and waited in the back of the emergency room near the pad, where the choppers land. While we waited, a medevac arrived with a Special Forces team wounded in action across the border.

It was chaos as the medical team tried to save those that they could and triage the rest. After watching for some time as the doctors performed surgery there in the emergency room to save several severely wounded, I wandered off into the building and directly behind the receiving room was an alcove with bodies stacked on gurneys for processing. It must have been a busy day. Only the feet were visible and each had a dog tag wired to a toe. A few hours later after dark a chopper came in with my sergeant and the body of Natalie. They had found him on

the side of the highway where he fell. I was asked to identify the body and was taken to a shed near the chopper pad where bodies were stored until they could be processed. My medic and I pulled Natalie's body out for identification but it was impossible to recognize him since he took a direct hit from a rocket-propelled grenade or RPG. My medic told me to find his dog tags and search his uniform and pockets for identification, and together we completed the task and agreed that this was Natalie.



We collected our exhausted sergeant and headed back to the battery across town. We were on edge because it was dark, and the trip was outside the wire and we were a small detachment with little firepower to defend ourselves except for our M16s. We arrived safely and everyone in our unit wanted information. My sergeant was emotionally drained and devastated by what had happened. He held himself responsible and broke down in tears pleading with me to send him home. This was his third tour, and he had seen enough. He was damaged, and all I could do was assure him that he made the right decisions and he could not have saved Natalie. In fact, a colonel called me that night and praised the actions of our sergeant.

I was told that "he was some soldier, and we should be proud of him." He had performed superbly but all I could do was tell him that I would try to get him home early. Unfortunately, there was nothing I could do and he was still in the country serving out his tour when I left a few months later.

Memorial Day, to me, is all about Natalie and the sacrifice he made in 1970. I had many men wounded during my tour, and I am sure that several did not survive. It is Natalie whom I remember. I have always felt responsible for his death because I let him go despite my gut feeling that it was a mistake. I did learn from that mistake and demanded for the rest of my tour that anyone "short" sit tight, stay bored and go home in one piece.

I was lucky and survived Vietnam, but he did not. My life has been full with a wife who loves me, children I am proud of and grandchildren I can enjoy at the end of my life. Natalie lost his life and missed that opportunity. I will always remember him every year on Memorial Day.

*[Around 660,000 Americans have died in wars since 1776.—ed.]*

Board: Vicki Sullivan, vickisullivan@comcast.net, 327-5339

Bulletin: Michelle Hogan (May 28), 468-3386

Finance: Helena Wee, 520-7556

Hospitality: Jim Davis, 328-2584

Liturgy: John Arnold, 325-1421, jsaoso@comcast.net;

Sally Benson, (408) 972-5843, red5@svpal.org

Needs Net: Roberta Kehret, 494-1488, robkehr@yahoo.com

Spiritual Education: Mary Coady, 261-9155, Jim Davis, 328-2584