

## Fr. George's Reflection for Memorial Day, May 31, 2021

The last Monday of May is a federal holiday in the United States. It is a day for honoring and mourning military personnel who have died while serving their military duties. On this day, we can visit cemeteries and memorials to honor and mourn those who died while serving in the military. Volunteers often place an American flag on the graves of military personnel in national cemeteries. *The photo below was taken at Georgia National Cemetery in Canton, GA.*



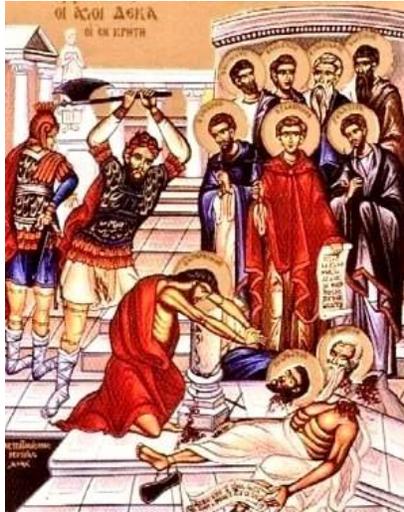
Our Archbishop, His Eminence Elpidophoros observed, *“On this day in the USA, we remember those who never came home from war. We pray as President Lincoln that for their sacrifice, ‘our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of bereavement and leave only the cherished memory of the loved and lost.’ Eternal memory.”*

My Brother Priest, Fr. Elias Villis shared a beautiful prayer for today. Let us pray:

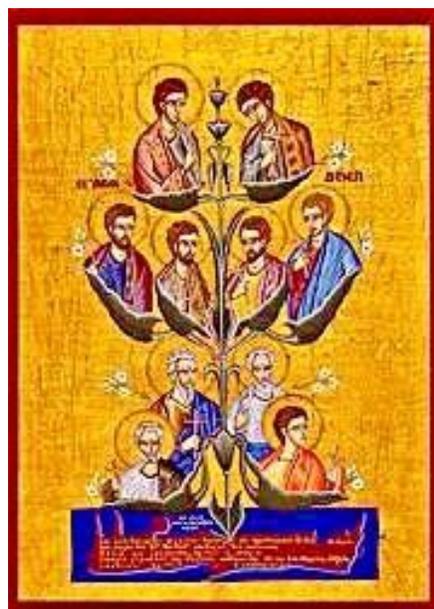
*“Lord our God, we thank you for the brave men and women who have sacrificed their lives and continue to sacrifice their lives so courageously and selflessly for our nation. We ask for Your blessing over them and their families. We pray that You would be gracious and bless them with Your peace. We pray for Your great favor and goodness to be evident in their lives giving them hope in Your Resurrection. Please be with all those who wear the uniform, who serve our communities and nation every single day. We ask that You provide Your protection over them. We ask that You draw them to Yourself amidst the dangers they face in a dark world, for You are the Resurrection, the Truth, the Way and the Light and to You do we give glory, honor, and worship to the ages of ages. Amen.”*

Yesterday, I was moved deeply as His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios, joined by many clergy and faithful at Annunciation Cathedral offered a Memorial Service in commemoration of ***The Ten Martyrs of Crete*** who perished in 250. My father would witness about the bravery of our martyrs and he and my mother taught us to do likewise. Yesterday, as we prayed for the memory of these soldiers for Christ, I was reminded that our U.S. military inspires all of us to be courageous; should not we, in turn, sacrifice to support and defend our country like them, and especially for our religious faith. With their martyrdom remembered yesterday, and the memory of our soldiers who offered their lives for us remembered today, I believe we could benefit from asking ourselves, ***“What can I do to protect our nation?”*** Similarly, ***“What can I do to put God first... to serve as His soldier protecting His Holy Body, the Church?”***

For Orthodox Christians, Memorial Day reminds us it is a duty to mourn the fallen heroes of our country. Likewise, every day in the Orthodox Church, we remember the lives of men, women, and children who perished in defense of our Risen Lord. Their sacrifices ensured we are motivated to do likewise. The following reflection on The Ten martyrs of Crete is reprinted from <https://www.goarch.org>.



“These Saints, who were all from Crete, contested for piety's sake during the reign of Decius, in the year 250. Theodulus, Saturninus, Euporus, Gelasius, and Eunician were from Gortynia, the capital; Zoticus was from Knossos; Agathopus, from the port city of Panormus; Basilides, from Cydonia; Evarestus and Pompey, from Heraklion. Forced before the Governor as Christians, they were subjected to torments for thirty days, being scourged, racked, dragged upon the ground through dung heaps, stoned, and spit upon. They were questioned again, but their constancy roused the Governor to greater fury. After subjecting them to torments more bitter still, he had them beheaded.



Festal Hymn of The 10 Martyrs of Crete: *Let us now honor Crete, that land most marvelous, which sprouted forth the ten flowers revered by all, those goodly pearls of Christ our God, those verdant boughs of the Martyrs; for although they were but ten, the most blessed men put to shame the ten thousand armored host of the wicked demonic ranks. And hence, they have received crowns of glory as stout-hearted Martyrs of Christ Savior.*

Another Hymn for The 10 Martyrs of Crete: *Shining like a morning star, the Martyrs' contest, worthy of all reverence, hath shown beforehand unto us Him that was born in a lowly cave, and Whom the Virgin conceived without seed of man.*

On this Memorial Day let us be grateful for the sacrifices of our military. Like President Lincoln, let us pray that *“our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of bereavement and leave only the cherished memory of the loved and lost.”* May we all seek God’s strength to be brave like The 10 Martyrs of Crete and so many others throughout the ages. May their memory be eternal. Amen.