

A blessed Armed Forces Day weekend to all past and present veterans out there; we thank you for your service to our nation and her people. I saw almost no note of it in the media, but that does not mean you are not very much appreciated. The military is highlighted in times of national trouble, but attention fades a bit during quieter times of relative peace—peace, which is always a blessing for a nation’s people. Yet this is the way of any vocation of service: at times, out of sight and mind, yet always at the ready.

Knowing you are there—many on the ramparts daily—gives your fellow citizens a greater sense of pride and security, even if it is not expressed as often as it might be. And as MacArthur said in his [farewell speech](#) to the cadets at West Point—one of the most moving speeches in American history (even more so to [hear](#) than to read), your service “... does not mean that you are warmongers. On the contrary, the soldier above all other people prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. But always in our ears ring the ominous words of Plato, that wisest of all philosophers: ‘Only the dead have seen the end of war.’” While war may never be eradicated, we pray for that end nonetheless.

Service: one of the most sublime of concepts. The word itself evokes images of self-giving and self-sacrifice. In the mind’s eye, we might envision idealized versions of knights errant, Japanese samurai, or selfless superheroes. Why do we idealize such? Because in our conscious, subconscious, and conscience, we instinctively realize the honor of selflessness for the good of others—especially those most in need, materially or spiritually. While many will fawn over a wealthy yet stingy man in hopes of their gain, few will love him (“*When the rich man speaks all are silent, and they extol to the clouds what he says...*” (Sirach 13:23)). Yet, the person who sincerely gives of himself is loved not only by those who receive and admired by all but the most cynical and hard-hearted.

No doubt some will think those who are generous as fools, but even if so, those “fools” are in very good company—saints and Christ Himself. The Christian—and any who give of themselves through jeers and scoffing—find solace in scripture: “We are fools for Christ’s sake...We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute...” (1 Corinthians 4:10) and yet “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” (1 Peter 4:14).

Jesus, of course, is the model of self-sacrifice, even to giving His very life upon the cross for humanity. Christian believer or not, do not all recognize such as the very pinnacle of service? For, as He said, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) When we combine this with another of Jesus’ exhortations, we witness the magnitude of His own sacrifice: “I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...” (Matthew 5:44-45), for Jesus forgave His executioner as He hung from the cross. (Luke 22:34)

Hmmm ... it would seem that “so that” makes loving one’s enemies a condition of being children of the Father. Is this possible, especially if we’re tempted—and even *encouraged* daily—to hate? Yes, ‘tis quite possible; in fact, it is evident in countless examples throughout the world.

It’s easy to let bitterness bore into our souls—anger at past slights and hurts, opportunities denied unfairly, exploitation, etc. But what good does that do except to continually burn with resentment without benefit, for such is venom to the spirit? Rather, should we not “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled...” (Hebrews 12:14-15) Bitterness and anger defile, for they obliterate forgiveness and reconciliation; why waste precious time we have on earth over things we cannot—or *refuse* to—correct as best we can?

Thus, the wisdom of Jesus and His apostles: that forgiveness and subsequent reconciliation lift us from the burden of the mortal to the realm of the immortal and God-like. Since God IS love, then to be without love is to be without God. But, despite human stubbornness, how fortunate it is that love never ceases to try to penetrate the hardened heart—God’s hand of grace is always stretched toward us to guide us from the wilderness of hatred to a garden of love.

But, as difficult as it can be, we must make an effort to grasp that hand in our day-to-day, for St. John warns: “...If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.” (1 John 4:20-21) And Jesus is quite adamant: “...if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15) In our human limitation we may fail in this, but we must sincerely try nonetheless.

So, let us make all efforts to forsake bitterness and hatred, and grasp that which profits all. As St. Paul heard in his vision: “It hurts you to kick against the goad.” (Acts 26:14) The “goad” is our conscience; the goad is love itself.