

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 30 – October 1, 2017 – Reflection

"Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with
God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human
likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming
obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the
name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee
should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and
every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord ..."

(Philippians 2)

Near the rolling hills of Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia stands
the United States Marine Corps War Memorial. It depicts the six
soldiers who raised the American flag at Iwo Jima in the Japanese
Volcano Islands on February 23, 1945 signaling the beginning of the
end of World War II in the Pacific.

The memorial is dedicated to "the Marine dead of all wars and their
comrades of other services who fell fighting beside them."

The flag the soldiers are shown raising seventy-two years ago now flies twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

The stars and stripes have flown as the flag of the United States of America almost since the birth of the Republic. Its colors harken to the Union Jack of the mother country, the United Kingdom with its red cross of St. George and its blue cross of St. Andrew. The thirteen alternating red and white stripes recall the original colonies and first states of America. The white calls the people to strive for innocence and pure intention; the red calls the nation to valor and strength. The blue square of stars represents a new constellation in the heavens shining vigilantly for justice and liberty.

Each day, school children throughout the land stand, place their hands over their hearts, and pledge fealty to what the flag stands for:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

These high sentiments have not always accorded with the reality: we have not always been one nation; we have not always been a Godly people with a Godly purpose; we have often been divided even to the point of shedding blood; and we have not always afforded liberty and justice for all, in the same measure, with the same rights and fairness.

At times the flag has been carried and saluted proudly. At times the flag has been burned and trampled upon. At times the flag has been flown upside down as a sign of distress. At times the flag has draped the coffin of a soldier or sailor or airman or marine come home to rest

forever. At times the flag has been held in the hands of a mother or wife or sweetheart as her tears fall upon its folded corners.

We stand in the presence of the flag, not because it represents a perfect society where all the high values it enfolds are realized, but because as it waves, it calls us to be our best selves. But, the flag of this country also waves to defend the rights of those who feel oppressed, disenfranchised, dismissed, and devalued not to stand, not to salute, not to celebrate, but to kneel in silence, praying for the day when the flag's ideal will be the nation's reality.

Throughout our history, Christians have been asked to pledge allegiance to gods and Caesars, to Duce's and Fuhrers, to kings and princes, to parties and philosophies. For two thousand years, Christians have strived, wherever they are on the globe, to be good and loyal citizens, faithful to the fatherland, honorable and just members of society. But if the society is unjust, if the leader goes astray, if the demand be that truth be denied and the lie enthroned, then the Christian must make a choice. With Whom will I stand? Under what banner will I march? In Whose cause will I fight? For Whose law would I rather die than break.

In the end, you cannot be a disciple of God and the world. It will always come down to a choice: no matter the flag, no matter the age, no matter the country, no matter the politician or the philosophy.

Will you stand first before the flags of the world, or will you kneel before the Name that is above every Name in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: Jesus Christ the Lord?

