

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
31st Annual Memorial Mass
18 May 2025



A good Franciscan Sister of the Eucharist who is also a professor here at The Catholic University of America gave me her book entitled simply *Elwood*. It recounts the story of a young cousin Elwood Euert who after his ROTC training was commissioned in the Rhode Island National Guard which was called into Federal Service shortly after the outbreak of WWII.

He was on the *S.S. President Coolidge*, an ocean liner converted to a troop ship much like the *Queen Mary* that took my father to England for the same war. The *Coolidge*, however, headed west and after several weeks was ready to land on Espiritu Santo Island in the Pacific, but hit two U.S. land mines. The captain beached the vessel on the coral and ordered everyone to abandon ship. Capt. Euert, who was charged with the mess, would have made it to safety, but he thought about the kitchen crew who might be trapped in the kitchen or the food lockers of the ship. He went back into that area of the ship and rescued them, but then was unable to save himself and drowned.

His was the heroic action we know so well. We gather this afternoon in the magnificent Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception to pray for those who have fallen in service to our Country. It is good to remember and to draw strength from their service in the hope that we might be able to imitate their devotion to comrades at arms and to the great virtues on which our Nation is built. Great deeds only inspire us in our individual vocations.

The Gospel speaks to us about that great virtue of love and notes that the early Church spread, as the Lord predicted, because its members were imbued with that love of neighbor and remained faithful in the context of violence and persecutions. We celebrate this XXXI annual Mass on the day that Pope Leo XIV gave solemn, prayerful beginning to

his Petrine ministry in the universal Church. I would be remiss if I did not mention that the Pope's father and a brother served in the US Navy.

The AMS just had another experience of that self-giving love. We gathered on Thursday for the 65th annual International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes, France. Once again, the Knights of Columbus made it possible for those who still carry the wounds of war in mind or body and those Veterans suffering from other illnesses to participate. It was impressive, as always, to gather with military members from around the world to pray to Christ through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and request divine favors, healing, and peace in our world. We wanted to echo the first greeting of our new Holy Father: "Peace be with you all!"

Significantly, the Ukrainian delegation received a long ovation. Most of the world recognizes that they are the victims of cruel aggression.

The pilgrimage was established to encourage rapprochement between the French and the Germans after World War II. It is wonderful to see 17,000 gathered to pray for peace and reconciliation under the sign of hope, the theme for this Jubilee Year.

The Gospel has challenged us to accept Christ's invitation and embrace the message of love and forgiveness. You notice that Jesus does not propose an ideal, a value, a hope, a pious wish, He gives us a commandment. "No word could be stronger, more absolute, more non-negotiable."¹ Love of God and love of neighbor summarize the Christian life. The journey may be challenging, but the reward is eternal—the only one worth having. We depend on his help to make the journey.

Remember that the love proclaimed by Jesus Christ is so distinctive that it is the calling card of His missionary disciples. Think about the Romans wondering what could motivate Christians to face lions, corporal punishment, and crucifixion to forgive their enemies and sing hymns as they died! It was something absolutely new among their global conquests and led to the ultimate question: "what do they have that we do not?" They converted, the known world converted, and it can happen again.²

The Acts of the Apostles describe the mission of the early Church. She went to tell about the victory of Christ and to invite others to share in that number. During the Easter Season we read from St. Luke's second book which describes the growth of the Church from Jerusalem towards the ends of the earth.

Today's passage from the Acts of the Apostles also offers us the sound structure for moving forward. There is the initial enthusiasm of the proclamation of the kerygma about Jesus Christ. Then the Apostles return to confirm the faith of the missionary community and to assure its sound growth through organization. One of my responsibilities as the Chief Shepherd for the Catholic faith communities in the military is to confirm your growth. That

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Food for the Soul C*, p. 301.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

responsibility comes to its fullness in our gathering this afternoon to remember those who have gone before us.

We should be encouraged. They did so much with so little. They traveled with no modern means. They wrote letters long before the world of the internet. They communicated especially by the example of the communities and their courage in the face of opposition, brutal torture, and ridicule and often also the loss of social position. Yet they remained steadfast and encourage us in an age dominated by materialism, secularism, and relativism.

We take courage in Pope Leo's messages. He spoke, among other themes of peace and truth to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See: "From a Christian perspective – but also in other religious traditions – peace is first and foremost a gift. It is the first gift of Christ: "My peace I give to you" (*Jn* 14:27). Yet it is an active and demanding gift. It engages and challenges each of us, regardless of our cultural background or religious affiliation, demanding first of all that we work on ourselves. Peace is built in the heart and from the heart, by eliminating pride and vindictiveness and carefully choosing our words. For words too, not only weapons, can wound and even kill."³

He added: "The third word is *truth*. Truly peaceful relationships cannot be built, also within the international community, apart from truth. Where words take on ambiguous and ambivalent connotations, and the virtual world, with its altered perception of reality, takes over unchecked, it is difficult to build authentic relationships, since the objective and real premises of communication are lacking."⁴

The new heaven and the new earth of the Book of Revelation only comes about when you and I practice virtue, pray, and give exemplary service in whatever we do. Is that not one reason why they annual celebration is organized? We profit from the example of those who have gone before us and we want to pray for the repose of their souls. We also want to honor those who are ill or burdened with the weight of war.

We also offer prayers for those graduating from the Coast Guard, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Merchant Marine Academies and all of those graduates who have participated in R.O.T.C. This perfect prayer is our occasion to remember them and to pray for those who serve in countries far from home.

Today we honor the contemporary Elwoods who gave their lives for others in the defense of freedom, those who passed away from natural causes, and the priests who have passed away since last year. Allow me to close by recalling Pope Leo's initial greeting of peace. We make that our prayer for the places afflicted by war and conflict and also as an appeal to more civility in our society.

³ Pope Leo XIV, Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps, 16.V.25.

⁴ *Ibid.*