

Matthew 6:24

Memorial Day weekend...at one time Americans paused to remember those soldiers who gave their lives so that we can enjoy freedom and prosperity. Times have changed. Memorial Day is now the unofficial beginning of summer, the weekend of the big race in Indianapolis, and the day when shoppers are out in force to take advantage of Memorial Day sales.

I wonder if those soldiers who died in battle would have been so eager to lay down their lives had they known that the day set aside to remember them would become little more than a day off from school and from work, and a day to hit the stores with credit cards in hand? And yet, certainly the last thing on these soldiers' minds is what we would do for them. They were focused upon what they were doing for us. They fought and were willing to die not to gain a place somewhere within our memories, but because they were loyal to our country and committed to the cause of defending it with their very lives.

Jesus' words in our text apply to them: "No one can serve two masters." During the World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Wars against Terrorism, no soldier could fight both for us and for the enemy. It's an impossibility. Even a traitor serves only one master. He may pretend to be on our side, but in reality he is fighting against us; he is in service not to us, but to our enemy.

Let us remember that faithful and loyal soldiers are a blessing from God. Would you want a military defending our country's shores and borders which is committed, not to us, but to the highest bidder against us? Could you sleep well at night with the knowledge that those who are supposed to serve us, even with their lives if necessary, are not in the least bit loyal to us? Even if you watch the race later today; even if you go out shopping tomorrow; even if you fire up the grill and kick off your summer with a barbeque feast, let us not forget to thank God for every soldier who has, and who is willing to lay down their life for us.

And as we remember our American soldiers, let's also give thought to what kind of soldiers we are for our Lord. In a few minutes we will sing, "Onward, Christian Soldiers... marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before; Christ, the royal Master leads against the foe, forward into battle see His banners go..." I'm sure we will sing these words with gusto. But are they really true of us? Are we committed soldiers of Christ? Are we loyal to His Church? Are we willing to lay down our life for Him if necessary? Christ is our "royal Master" we sing, but are we really serving Him? "No one can serve two masters," He says. Where do your loyalties really lie—with Christ, or somewhere else?

"You cannot serve God and mammon," Jesus says, "Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." I'm quite certain that all of us would pass the test today...with our lips. If asked, "Do you love God above money and the things money can buy?" We would say, "Absolutely, yes!" None of us would check the box that says: I despise God and am devoted to the things of this world. We would all say that we are serving God and not mammon.

Our lives, however, reveal what is truly within our heart. Of your monthly income, how much is devoted to God? Do we give ten-percent to His Church, or is it closer to one-percent? Of the 168 hours in your week, how many are spent in service to God? Ten-

percent? One-percent? Maybe only a few minutes? We often don't even want to give Him a few hours on Sunday morning. Of the players making up the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team, how many can you name? Six? Ten? Twelve? Can you name that many of Jesus' twelve disciples? Can you name twelve books of the New Testament? You may know the words to "Take Me out to the Ballgame," but can you recite a Christian hymn from memory? You may sit down to watch television a little each day...do you also sit down to read the Word of God?

We may say that we are loyal and committed to God; that we are His faithful servants, but our day-to-day living often says just the opposite. Are we only half-way committed to Him? Are we partly loyal? But Jesus says that no one can serve two masters. We cannot be half-committed to God and half-committed to the things of this world. It's all or nothing. Either we serve God or we despise Him. Either we love Him or we hate Him.

This is not just a day to remember, it is a day to repent. Let us repent of our wickedness. Let us forsake our sinful ways and turn to God with hearts that are sorrowful.

Friend, I have good news for you...God forgives you. Why? Because the greatest Soldier who ever lived did not fight against Hitler, or Saddam, or Bin Laden—He fought against Satan for you. He fought the fight that you could not win, and He gained for you the victory. Jesus Christ laid down His life on the cross of Calvary. With your sins in His body He laid down on the cross for you. With your name on His lips He prayed to His Father for your forgiveness. No soldier was ever as loyal as Him. No soldier ever gave up more for you than He did. No soldier could have secured for you the battle against sin, death, and hell. Jesus won that battle for you.

"No one can serve two masters," Jesus says. He didn't just speak these words; He lived them. Jesus is devoted to only one master. He is not half-committed or partly committed. He is totally committed to His master. Do you know who Jesus master is? It's you! You are Jesus master. Why? Because He is your Suffering Servant. He devoted Himself to serving you with His very life. In service to you He endured the punishment of hell in your place. Jesus lowered Himself to the place which was beneath you taking your sins upon Himself and dying for you. In Holy Baptism He serves you giving you the life He won for you in these holy waters. In Holy Communion Jesus serves you giving you His body and blood for the remission of all your sins. Here in our Sunday service it is not we who are serving Him, but Jesus is here serving you; through His words He gives you the treasures of heaven.

Jesus has no master except you. He despised the things of this world when Satan tempted Him. He would not allow anything to stand between Him and the task of saving you from your sins. Jesus has nothing but love in His heart for you. He hates your enemies. He is against those who hate you. Though Satan tries daily to tear you away from Him, Jesus continues to fight for you. Through His Word and Sacraments He keeps engaging your enemy. Through these holy things He keeps giving you the victory.

When you and I sing the words, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," remember with joy that it is really Christ who is fighting for us. He fights, He leads, He marches on, and to you He gives the victory. He defeats your enemies, He wins the battle, He cries the words, "It is finished!" for you, and to you He gives forgiveness, life, and salvation.

With such a Soldier fighting for you; with such a Savior; with such a merciful Lord, how can we not desire to live for Him? How can we not desire to serve only Him? We can and we will, as Christ Himself lives within us, and through us keeps us moving “Onward, as His Christian Soldiers.” Amen.