

## **Memorial Day Message**

**1 John 3:16**

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Memorial Day is a time when our country pauses to remember those in our military who died for the freedoms that all of us enjoy as Americans.

It is also fitting that we remember the Lord who died and gave us salvation and liberty in his holy name.

**My text is 1 John 3:16. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.**

Memorial Day and our scripture text have one thing in common. And that is the sacrifice for others. On Memorial Day, our nation remembers the sacrifices of our fallen comrades.

And spiritually speaking, when God sent Jesus to die on the cross, it was done so that we might have eternal life. Jesus in effect had become the sacrifice that took our place, for our own sins.

An example of sacrifice was what took place by a priest who lived near Rome in AD 270. His name was Father Valentine. He is the same one that Valentine's Day is named after.

At the time, Christians were imprisoned for not worshipping the Roman gods. In addition, Emperor Claudius banned marriages because he was concerned young Roman men were not joining the military to stay with their new brides; and did not want to lose their lives in combat. Father Valentine continued to perform Christian marriages and was arrested.

During his trial, prosecutors asked Father Valentine what he thought of the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury. Of course, he said they were false gods and he was imprisoned.

When Roman authorities heard that Father Valentine was active making converts in prison, he was beheaded. You see Father Valentine was willing to risk further punishment and the loss of life to spread the Good News of Jesus to those who needed it.

**1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.** The spirit of this Bible verse extends to what we are doing today as we honor the lives of the fallen on Memorial Day.

The following is from the book of the Stones of the Heart: It was during the first World War when the American and German armies were involved in a ferocious battle in a very narrow strip of no man's land. A young German soldier who attempted to cross that dangerous area had been shot and he had become entangled in the barbed wire.

As he cried out in anguish, both sides could hear him scream. Finally, one American soldier, who could not stand it any longer, crawled to where that wounded German soldier was. When the Americans and Germans realized the situation, they stopped firing.

The American soldier disentangled him, picked him up and carried him to the German side and handed him over to his comrades. As he turned to walk away, he was stopped by a German officer who took off his Iron Cross medal for bravery and gave it to the American soldier.

When the soldier walked back to safety in the American side, everyone resumed the insanity of war.

This story illustrates the spirit of that scripture. ***And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*** The American soldier was willing to lay down his life for the wounded German soldier, his enemy, which was so commendable.

To further illustrate Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, consider this story. This could not happen in today's culture but there was a young man named Steve who had behavior problems in a Utah high school.

It got to the point that none of the teachers wanted Steve in their class, except Mr. Christianson who agreed to take him, providing that Steve would abide by his rules.

One day, Steve broke one of the rules when he was late for class. This was the conversation Mr. Christianson and Steve had.

Teacher: "You think you're pretty tough, don't you?"

Steve: "Yeah I do."

Teacher: "How many pushups can you do?"

Steve: "I do about 200 every night".

Teacher: "200? That is pretty good. Do you think you could do 300?"

Steve: "I have never done 300 at a time."

Teacher: "Can you do 300 in sets of 10?"

Steve: "I think I can do it."

Teacher: "Good. I need you to do this on Friday."

Friday came and when the class started, Mr. Christianson pulled out three boxes of donuts. The donuts were the extra fancy, cream centered with frosting swirls. Everyone was pretty excited.

Mr. Christianson went to the first girl in the first row and asked, "Cynthia, do you want a donut?" She said "Yes".

He turned to Steve and asked. "Steve, would you do 10 push-ups so Cynthia could have a donut."

Steve said "Sure" and he jumped down and did a quick 10. The teacher gave her a donut.

The teacher then said to the next student, "Joe do you want a donut?" Joe said "Yes."

The teacher said, "Steve would you do ten push-ups so Joe can have a donut?" Steve did 10 pushups and Joe got a donut.

And so it went, Steve did 10 pushups for every person in the first aisle and they all got their donut. He did this all the way down the second aisle until he came to Scott. Scott was the captain of the football team and played center for the basketball team.

The teacher asked, "Scott do you want a donut?"

Scott asked, "Can I do my own pushups?"

The teacher said, "No, Steve has to do them. Then Scott said, "Well I don't want one".

The teacher said to Steve, "Would you do ten pushups so Scott can have a donut he doesn't want."

Scott said, "I said I didn't want one."

The teacher said, "These are my rules and my donuts. Leave it on the desk if you don't want it." And he put a donut on Scott's desk.

By this time, Steve had begun to slow down and began to perspire. When the teacher started down the third row, the students were beginning to be uncomfortable. Now, the students

were beginning to say "No" and there were all these uneaten donuts on the desks.

When he got to Susan who was the very last person, the teacher asked, "Susan, do you want a donut".

With tears in her eyes, she said. "Mr. Christianson, I can't, let me go and help him".

The teacher said, "No he has to do it alone"

The room was quiet when Steve slowly finished. He had done 300 pushups and he lay on the floor exhausted.

Then the teacher broke the silence. He said, "Our Savior Jesus Christ had done everything that was required of Him when he was nailed to the cross. Think about what was done today in class.

Although the gift of the donut was given freely, many never responded, and left this gift sitting on their desk never to be eaten, never to be enjoyed. And this is like our Christian faith; we can accept or reject Christ."

I can tell you this story had a major impact on everyone and I suspect Steve had become a good student.

- Sacrifice is what Jesus had done when he died on the cross.
- Sacrifice is when Father Valentine was beheaded in the Roman prison for his faith.
- Sacrifice is when the American risked his life for the German soldier.
- Sacrifice is when Steve did all those pushups for his classmates.

- Sacrifice is when all our military personnel who gave their lives for our freedoms. As we go back to our Christian faith, Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Figuratively speaking, the push-ups have been done. God is waiting for us to pick up the gift and enjoy the privilege of walking as a disciple of his son. Let us not shy away from any sacrifices that we may be called upon to do on behalf of our faith.

Let me close with this poem.

**It is the Soldier** by Charles Province.

It is the soldier, not the minister who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the soldier not the reporter who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the soldier, not the poet who has given us the freedom of speech.

It is the soldier, not the campus organizer who has given us the freedom to protest.

It is the soldier not the lawyer who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the soldier, not the politician who has given us the right to vote.

It is the soldier who salutes the flag who serves beneath the flag and whose coffin is draped by the flag who allows the protester to burn the flag.