



## BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church  
Memorial Day  
May 25, 2026  
Sr. Belinda Monahan

Acts 1:12-14  
Psalm 87  
John 19:25-24

A couple of years ago, Memorial Day coincided with the Anunciation, and I found myself somehow having to give a set of reflections which tied the two together. Today, although the Marian feast is different, I once again found myself wondering how in the world I was going to be able to find another linkage between these two commemorations. Then I looked at the readings. The question that almost immediately rose to mind is “How do we live our lives in such a way as to honor the sacrifices of those who have given their lives for us? How do we keep faith with them?”

The apostles and the women (including Mary) in the first reading are an example of what it means to keep faith in the face of sadness and confusion and doubt. Although the Memorial of Mary Mother of the Church is always commemorated on the Monday after Pentecost, our first reading immediately follows the reading from the Ascension. As Sue Q. so eloquently spoke about on that day, those who had witnessed the Ascension were probably feeling at something of a loss; not certain what to do. In a relatively short period of time, they had seen Jesus die, witnessed his resurrection, and then found themselves watching him physically be “taken up to heaven.” Death is at least familiar; like Sus, I can only imagine how confused they must have been.

But rather than giving up and walking away, they return to the basics of what Jesus had taught them. We sometimes think of going to the upper room as hiding themselves away, but in this passage, as they gather in the upper room—together—they are not doing so out of fear; instead they devote themselves to prayer. They needed to spend time together and with God in order to be able to try to understand what had happened and how they were to move forward in the world as it existed post-death, resurrection, and Ascension. They return to strengthen that relationship with God that Jesus spent his whole life (and death, and resurrection) pointing to.

Today’s gospel also contains an example of Mary and the apostles keeping faith with Jesus in his sacrifice. First, the women and at least one of the disciples have remained at the foot of the cross. They were willing to take on the ordeal of witnessing to Jesus’s suffering even at potential risk to them. In the presentation of Mary to the beloved disciple, we also see Jesus continuing to demonstrate how it is that he called his disciples—how it is that he calls us—to live. This action may be less about a glorified vision of motherhood that we see in the church’s description of Mary as Mother of the Church, than it is a hard look at the realities of the time and an attempt to mitigate harm. Instead it is an indication of the place women held in that time and place. A woman went from her father’s house to her husband’s house, to her son’s house. A woman without sons—even a woman whose son has died—is completely without access to resources.

Jesus recognizes that reality for Mary and “gives” her to one of his disciples to take care of. Even with his death approaching, his attention is focused on the poor and vulnerable, and he invites us to do the same. Both the beloved disciple and Mary respond in kind.

Memorial Day is the day on which we honor and mourn U.S. military personnel who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces. As a child of the seventies, I will admit that I struggle with the wars in which the US has been involved (or instigated) since I have been alive. But I do think that we are called to honor the men and women who gave their lives for a cause they believed in. What does it mean to live in such a way that honors their sacrifice?

Defense of the ideals of our nation—liberty, democracy, equality—need not, of course, take place on the battlefield. We are all aware of the situations in our nation, our city, and even our neighborhood in which people's rights are being curtailed or even violated. How are we "standing up" (in a metaphorical sense) for these people and their rights. Within our community, I see our newly reinvigorated social justice committee, and our "right to read" evenings—and I'm sure each individual Sister and Oblate has their own lists and their own individual activities. With such actions, even ones that seem small, we commemorate those who gave their lives to uphold the ideals of the nation; living in a way that honors their sacrifice.

And what of Mary Mother of the Church? When we think of Mary—or at least when "I" think of Mary, I tend to focus on the beginning of Jesus's life and/or ministry. Mary is Jesus's mother, sure, but what does it mean that she is the Mother of the Church? How does her life in that role point a way for us to live in such a way that honors her sacrifice or—since everything about Mary's life points to Jesus—that honors Jesus's sacrifice?

Nearly inescapably as we sit here in this chapel, beneath our beautiful Christus, we are reminded of the image of the church as the mystical body of Christ, of which Mary is the mother. How often do we REALLY recognize ourselves as one body in the way that this image calls us to? Speaking for myself, I do not always treat those in the church who cause me pain, or whom I view as dis-eased, with the same tenderness that I care for my own body when it is diseased or in pain. How does this feast call me back to an awareness of myself as inextricably tied to each member of the body of Christ and to live accordingly?

So, once again, it seems that the juxtaposition of Mary and Memorial Day is nowhere near as incongruous as it might seem from the outset. Even as we enjoy the unofficial beginning of summer and the good food we know is waiting for us downstairs, may we allow these commemorations to remind us of all of the people who have given their lives for us and to continue to live OUR lives in such a way that honors their sacrifice.

Happy Memorial Day.