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Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, gestures as he arrives to concelebrate the annual Pilgrimage and Memorial Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington May 17, 2026. Memorial Day is observed May 25 this year. (OSV News/Catholic Standard/Mihoko Owada)

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Washington — May 25, 2026

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Retired Army Lt. Gen. John Dubia tries to never miss the annual Memorial Mass for the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services.

At 82, the Leesburg, Virginia, resident and lifelong Catholic attends to remember his friends from the 1966 graduating class of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. That group of 579 holds the grim distinction of losing the highest number of graduates — 30 — of any West Point class during the Vietnam War. Another 100 were wounded.

An Ohio native, Dubia was deployed to Vietnam from 1968 to 1969 as a second lieutenant in the 1st Battalion of the 7th Field Artillery Regiment. From 1990 to

1992, as a brigadier general, he was the executive secretary to then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney. Promoted to lieutenant general in 1995, Dubia was director of the Army Staff before his retirement in 1999.

The memorial Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, held May 17 to remember Catholic war dead, is distinctly nonpartisan and generally unchanging. This year's celebration included no mention of the semiquincentennial of the United States. Rather, it echoed the quiet dignity of smaller Memorial Day services held nationwide, including the singing of the national anthem and the playing of taps.

There was a color guard from the U.S. Army Military District of Washington, and the congregation was dotted with uniformed men and women of all service branches. Knights of Columbus and some Knights of Malta attended in full regalia.

Archbishop Timothy Broglio, archbishop of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, was the principal celebrant and homilist, assisted by military chaplains and priests.

Dubia, who attended Georgetown University in Washington before enrolling at West Point, told OSV News that he has always enjoyed the pomp and "having the joint color guard there." He thinks Broglio "is absolutely phenomenal." He said he has been a supporter of the military archdiocese "for decades now."

This was the first year that he attended the Mass by himself. His wife of 59 years, Maureen, was unable to accompany him.

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The Mass was celebrated on Ascension Sunday, and the Gospel reading was Matthew 28:16-20, which includes the Great Commission of Jesus to the Apostles: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." In his homily, Broglio compared the Great Commission to military orders, since "most people end up with unexpected tasks."

He called Jesus' instructions "a clear message to the apostles."

Although in many parts of the world, evangelistic activities and religious faith are officially ridiculed by governments, "there are many signs that the mission continues," he said, pointing to a recent surge in conversions in the United States, Great Britain and France.

"We strive to the fullness of life," Broglio said. "There is no more reason to fear." The duty of the Church, he added, is "to be the visible means by which Christ acts in the world."

He praised the military mission as being to protect, defend and "provide security for the inalienable rights that bind us as a nation."

And he quoted Gen. Douglas MacArthur's farewell speech to cadets at West Point in 1962, when he said of the academy's motto "Duty, Honor, Country": "They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for action; not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm, but to have compassion on those who fall."

Of the military dead, Archbishop Broglio said, "We pray that all may enjoy the eternal rest of heaven."

Established in 1985 by St. John Paul II, the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services is unique in not having geographical boundaries in order to address the spiritual needs of all U.S. service personnel. It serves an estimated 1.8 million Catholics.