



Servant of God *JOSEPH VERBIS LAFLEUR* **Annual Memorial Mass**

The *'Friends of Lt. Fr. Lafleur'* request your presence on Tuesday, September 7, 2021 for 6:30pm Mass at St. Landry Catholic Church, Opelousas, LA. to commemorate the 77th Anniversary of the death of Lt. Father Joseph Verbis Lafleur, Chaplain-United States Army Air Corps. The Celebrant and Homilist will be Rev. Carl E. Beekman, priest of the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois and donor of Fr. J. Verbis Lafleur's ordination chalice. Also in attendance will be priests and deacons of the Diocese of Lafayette.

Joseph Verbis Lafleur was born in Ville Platte on January 24, 1912. Later, he would move with his family to nearby Opelousas, where he faithfully served as an altar boy at St. Landry Catholic Church during his youth; and where he also celebrated his first Solemn Mass following his ordination to the priesthood for the Diocese of Lafayette in 1938. Fr. Lafleur's first and only diocesan assignment was to St. Mary Magdalen Church in Abbeville. He soon joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1941 and was sent to serve at Clark Field in the Philippine Islands before the United States entered the War.

Lt. Father Lafleur was taken as a prisoner of war by the Japanese and chose to stay with his men rather than be evacuated. His days were spent offering daily Mass in the prison camp, working as a slave laborer with the men, attending to the wounded, hopeless and dying. On September 7, 1944, he and several hundred other prisoners were killed when the ship upon which they were being transported was torpedoed. Father Lafleur's body was never recovered, but statements by survivors report that he was last seen aiding others to escape the sinking ship, refusing to leave the last of them. For his heroic military service, Father Lafleur was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart, and Bronze star for his valor. In October of 2017 he was posthumously awarded another Distinguished Service Cross and a second Purple Heart. On September 5, 2020 Lt. Father Joseph Verbis Lafleur's Cause for Beatification and Canonization was opened and he was declared, Servant of God.