

What Would Service to Our Country Mean to Me

In Ancient Rome, the idea of pietas was more than a virtue—it was a guiding principle, shaping the lives of every citizen. Rooted in devotion, pietas depicted three tiers of self-sacrifice: placing the gods, the fatherland, and others above oneself. When people ask me how often I think about the Roman Empire, I tell them I think about it constantly. The concept of pietas may have emerged two millennia ago, but its call to selflessness resonates with me every day. While Romans carried the responsibilities of pietas with them into combat, Americans have dutifully taken it up in their everyday lives.

To me, service to my country includes performing civic duties such as voting or enlisting. For many reasons, however, many Americans are unable to join the military and vote due to factors such as age or health. However, these citizens can still be impactful because service is woven into everyday life in quiet but powerful acts that uplift others. When reflecting on serving my country, I think of teachers who empower future generations, volunteers who feed the hungry, and parents who make everyday sacrifices for their children. These seemingly small acts ripple outward, touching countless lives and impacting communities.

Each morning, I walk into class with excitement, knowing my teachers are not merely teaching us, but committing to our success. I seize opportunities to join others in improving our community, from volunteering at food banks to organizing local events. At home, I see my parents' sacrifices—the hours spent in rush-hour traffic or rearranging their schedules to support me at swim meets. These routine acts embody pietas and service to my country: placing the needs of others above one's own. It allows us to serve out of love—for our families, for our communities, and for our country.

Regardless of income, race, and religion, everybody can embody the idea of pietas and serve America. It is a timeless call for us to put others before ourselves. This universality, to me, is the essence of citizenship, service, and pietas.