



Title: A Day of Remembrance

Theme: 15 Minute Memorial Day Message

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in our nation's service. There are many stories as to its actual beginnings, with over two dozen cities and towns laying claim to being the birthplace of "Memorial Day." There is also evidence that organized women's groups in the South were decorating graves before the end of the Civil War. A hymn published in 1867, "Kneel Where Our Loves are Sleeping" by Nella L. Sweet carried the dedication "To The Ladies of the South who are Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead" (Source: Duke University's Historic American Sheet Music, 1850-1920).

I would propose to you that it is not important who was the very first to celebrate "Memorial Day". What is important is that Memorial Day was established. "Memorial Day" is not about division. It is about reconciliation; it is about coming together to honor those who gave their all.

What do we know about "Memorial Day?" Memorial Day was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his General Order No. 11. It was first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. The first state to officially recognize the holiday was New York in 1873. By 1890 it was recognized by all of the northern states. It is now celebrated in almost every state on the last Monday of May.

In 1915, Moina Michael wrote a poem "In Flanders Fields," "We Cherish too, the Poppy Red... That grows on fields where valor led... It seems to signal to the skies... that blood of heroes never die.

She then conceived the idea to wear red poppies on "Memorial Day" in honor of those who died serving the nation during war. She was the first to wear one, and sold poppies to her friends and co-workers with the money going to benefit servicemen in need. Later a Madam Guerin from France was visiting the United States and learned of this new custom started by Ms. Michael. When she returned to France, she made artificial red poppies to raise money for war orphaned children and widowed women. This tradition spread to other countries. In 1921, the Franco-American Children's League sold poppies nationally to benefit war orphans of France and Belgium. The League disbanded a year later and Madam Guerin approached the VFW for help. Shortly before "Memorial Day" in 1922 the VFW became the first veterans' organization to nationally sell poppies. Two years later their "Buddy" Poppy program was selling artificial poppies made by disabled veterans. In 1948 the US Post Office honored Ms. Michael for her role in founding the National Poppy movement by issuing a red 3 cent postage stamp with her likeness on it.

Traditional observance of Memorial Day has diminished over the years. Many Americans today have forgotten the meaning and traditions of "Memorial Day." At many cemeteries, the graves of the fallen are increasingly ignored, neglected. Most people no longer remember the proper flag etiquette for the day. While there are towns and cities that still hold Memorial Day parades, many have not held a parade in decades.

There are a few notable exceptions. Since the late 50's on the Thursday before Memorial Day, the 1,200 soldiers of the 3d U.S. Infantry place small American flags at each of the more than 260,000 gravestones at Arlington National Cemetery. They then patrol 24 hours a day during the weekend to ensure that each flag remains standing.

We are blessed to have a President who knows the value observing "Memorial Day." From the heart he shared these words at Arlington National Cemetery at the "Memorial Day Commemoration" on May 31, 2004: "Through our history, America has gone to war reluctantly, because we have known the costs of war. And the war on terror we're fighting today has brought great costs of its own. Since the hour this nation was attacked, we have seen the character of the men and women who wear our country's uniform as they fought battles to achieve victories. These veterans of battle will carry with them for all their days the memory of the ones who did not live to be called veterans."

"They will remember young soldiers like Captain Joshua Byers, a West Point man born in South Carolina who died in Iraq. When this son of missionaries was given command of a 120-man combat unit, he wrote this to his parents: 'I will give the men everything I have to give. I love them already, just because they're mine. I pray, with all my heart, that I will be able to take every single one of them home safe when we finish our mission here.'"

Those who risked their lives on our behalf are often very clear about what matters most in their own lives, and they tell it to those they love. Listen to these words written by Master Sergeant Kelly Hornbeck, of the Special Forces, who was killed in action last January, south of Samarra. He wrote this to his parents back in Fort Worth, Texas: "I am not afraid, and neither should either of you be -- For I trust in my God and my training, two powerful forces that cannot be fully measured."

Although the burden of grief cannot not be easily done away with and the sadness over an unfinished life easily laid aside, it must be understood that completeness of a life is not measured in length only. It is measured in the deeds and commitments that give a life its purpose. And the commitment of these lives was clear to all: They defended our nation, they liberated the oppressed, they served the cause of peace. All Americans who have known the loss and sadness of war, whether recently or long ago, can know this: The person they love and miss is honored and remembered by the United States of America.

On May 26, 2003 the president of the of the United States of America closed his address to those listening in Arlington, Virginia with the true story of a Army Ranger, Captain Russell Rippetoe who was laid to rest. He shared how valiantly he gave his life and served with distinction of purpose in "Operation Iraqi Freedom." He had earned the "Bronze Star" and the "Purple Heart."

At Russell's funeral, his father Lieutenant Colonel Joe Rippetoe gave the farewell salute at the grave of his only son. During that farewell he read what was engraved on his son's dog tags, words from the Book of Joshua that gave this grieving father comfort, "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee."

Captain Russell Rippetoe joined a noble company of service and sacrifice of men and women who were strong and courageous and did not back off of their call and duty to the United States of America.

The Presidential Prayer team is asking that all in America take time to remember those who not only have served their country with their lives, but take time this day to remember those who are in harms way. Listen to the Word of the Lord found 1 Samuel 12:23-24 "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things He has done for you."

Let us Pray!!!!

