



Did you remember that this weekend is the annual celebration of Memorial Day? “Normally” as this national holiday approaches and as I prepare for the weekend and its services, I take an opportunity to think about all the people in our families, and yours, who have served our country and sacrificed so much for our freedom and to make sure I include an essence of that within my prayers. “Normally” I’m thinking about a Monday off; which then leads me to thoughts of hanging baskets, outside clean-up, and what delicious items will be on the grill. “Normally”, I’m keeping an eye on the sale ads, hoping that there’s some overlap with the items on the list. But sadly, and to be totally transparent, I didn’t even realize this weekend was Memorial weekend until late yesterday. How on earth could I have forgotten? It wasn’t even a thought on my mind which is embarrassing on many levels; not to mention disrespectful to the generations of military in our family.

So, with all of that being said, I would like to take this opportunity to remember and to offer my respect to the generations that have served our country. Enclosed you will find a message that I have read several times throughout my lifetime, and one that I feel stands repeating again. This is an excerpt from one of Billy Graham’s timeless messages, which still rings true as we remember with gratitude the sacrifices of so many for our nation. This particular message dates back to 1955, when he had just finished visiting many US Military installations in Europe. He was in Boston to deliver a memorial address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

“In all the American idiom, there is no more endearing word than “buddy.” It is warm, with intonations of friendship, brotherhood and common purpose. We are assembled today to pay tribute to those, our “buddies,” who poured out their full measure of devotion upon the altar of freedom.

Thousands of you gathered here could tell dramatic stories of heroism which you yourself have seen acted out by your buddies on the grim stage of war’s theater. They have left this realm of time and space, they have out-stripped us in life’s races, but the sacred memory of their selflessness and the freedom they died to obtain will live forever.

Three weeks ago, I had the privilege of spending an afternoon with President (Dwight D.) Eisenhower at Gettysburg. He took me on a personally conducted tour of the Battlefield of Gettysburg, explaining the strategy used by both the Confederate and Union forces. Both of my grandfathers fought at Gettysburg. This famous battlefield, and hundreds of others like it, have become hallowed soil, where thousands of Americans have died either to preserve freedom, prevent aggression or keep intact the union of American states.

Some months ago, when President Eisenhower was touring the Battlefield at Valley Forge and was being shown from one historic spot to another, he made this statement at the conclusion of the tour: “This is where they got it for us.”

What did he mean? He meant that those men, and thousands of others in all the wars that America has fought, purchased by their blood the freedoms that we enjoy today in “the land of the free, and the home of the brave.” That terse statement from the lips of our president has rung in my ears for many months. ...

These battlefields of the world today are hallowed and holy to every American, and we pause to give them our highest honors, humbly realizing the sacred trust that these, our war dead, have handed to us.

I stood by the bedside of a boy in Korea whose spine had been torn away by a shell blast the night before, but by some miracle he was still living. He was unable to change his position; and if he lived, the doctor informed me, the rest of his days would be spent lying on his stomach. The army medics had patched him up the best they could. I gripped his cold, perspiring hand and said words of comfort to him. He made a statement I will never forget. He said: "It was worth it if it will keep America free!"

That's what you call "getting it for us"! As we think of the selflessness and heroism of such fellows, we are reminded of the words of Jesus Christ who said: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

The freedoms we enjoy, the freedoms we take so much for granted, the freedoms we so often trifle with were bought not by the gold of our millionaires, nor altogether the genius of our scientists, nor the sacrifices of the people at home, but primarily by the blood, sweat and agony of those whose names on this day we honor—those who died that we might live!

They found, as have brave men of all ages, that there are principles well worth dying for. Their noble, unselfish sacrifice is a silent, eloquent rebuke to the self-centeredness of this generation. Let those who want "peace at any price" remember this day that thousands have died for honor and freedom and that what we have today has come at the price of shed blood. ...

As I stood in the hospital quarter of the Danish ship "Jutlandia" in Korean waters by an American boy scarcely 20 years of age and watched helplessly as this young life ebbed away, I thought: What right have thousands of pleasure-seeking Americans to go on living when this lad in the early flower of youth has to die? And in that moment, the fact dawned on me that if he had to die for America, some of us must live for America. Sometimes it is far more difficult to live than it is to die. They have handed us a torch, and we have a responsibility to see that they have not died in vain.

Even though the sacrifices of our war dead have been great, yet the greatest sacrifice of all time was made by a man on a cross who died not only physically, but spiritually that men might live. We have neglected Him too long! We have rejected His plan for peace, and as a result, we have fought, bled and died for centuries! I challenge the world at this hour to accept His program of heart regeneration that can transform the society in which we live, and we can know the meaning of genuine peace in our time. ...

Yes, the bells of liberty ring in America today because these men we honor today got through for us. The sacred memory of their sacrifice will always live in our hearts, and we have a sacred and holy trust—and we cannot fail them!

My mind goes back 2,000 years to another battle which was fought on a hill called Calvary. It was a battle of one young man against all the forces of evil. It seemed like a futile, hopeless struggle as Jesus Christ took on Satan's task force single-handed. The jeers of the rabble, the spittle of the soldiers and the sneering of the people were incidental compared to the inner struggle which was taking place in His soul. But I watch Him, in fancy, as one hand is stretched out toward God and the other toward rebellious man, and He makes the connection and says: "It is finished." He got through for us!

If we are to be strong spiritually, it will be through Him. Thousands today are finding a fresh, new meaning of life through Him. They are learning to say with confidence, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengthened me." We can best keep faith with those who have gone before by keeping faith with ourselves, with our highest ideals and with God."

Source: The Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

On this Memorial Day Weekend, we pray for those who courageously laid down their lives for the cause of freedom. May the example of their sacrifice inspire in us the selfless love of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Bless the families of our fallen troops and fill their homes and their lives with your strength and peace. In union with people of goodwill of every nation, inspire us to answer the call to work for peace and justice, and thus, seek an end to violence and conflict around the globe.

Amen.