

DATE: 5/31/10

Good Morning:

Our great nation was given birth by patriots who did not know they could not win the revolution, did not know when they were beaten, and did not know it was useless to continue to struggle. Those heroes were instilled with a deep and abiding sense of liberty that would not be denied. With the sacrifice of much blood and treasure surviving horrible ordeals they ultimately prevailed.

Those valiant hearts rang a clarion call for liberty that resonates round this world even today. As a result of what they did through the years more and more people have undertaken to wrest liberty from the tyrants. Yet every generation produces those motivated by the Prince of Darkness who would deny, subvert or eradicate the freedom to which all people are entitled by natural right.

Today we gather here to honor the memory of those who gave their all in the continuing struggle to preserve this nation and the liberty we enjoy. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. It has been the responsibility of every generation of Americans since 1776 to step forward, man the ramparts and defend that which was so dearly won by our forefathers. Because they were right and God Almighty was with them they triumphed.

The United States is a Christian nation, statements to the contrary notwithstanding. We are a proud people. Being proud is not being arrogant when the pride is justified.

We would rather that sacrifice for our national security would not be necessary. We recognize there are times when there is no alternative but to sacrifice for our defense. We are proud of those who without hesitation have carried the flag into battle in order that our nation may survive. We are proud of and honor those who have served in the military in the best tradition of the patriots of old.

At the same time we honor the memory of those who served in the nation's armed services we should honor the memory of departed family and friends. Although many of them have never met the hostile enemy, have never heard the roar of battle they too have served our nation.

Those engaged with the enemy must know they have the support of those at home. It is the responsibility of everyone to convey their appreciation and gratitude to those engaged with the enemies of our people.

As we gather here today it is appropriate we pause to reflect. It is as though we stand at the pinnacle and look down into the valley of peace and quiet. We note the orderly rows of monuments marking the final resting place of many individuals who trod the walks and by-ways we tread.

The names etched on many of the monuments are those of friends and relatives. Some names are strange to us. Regardless, all are at place with their creator.

It is natural for us to look at the past. We recall the good times and the fun times. With nostalgia we may briefly wish we could relive those times. We may even wish we could one more time laugh with and enjoy the company of a father or a mother. Perhaps we would think about the sacrifice our parents made for us in so many ways. We probably regret we did not express our love for them or show enough appreciation for what they did for us as much as we now realize we could have.

Not all times were good times. Some were difficult and hard to bear. Those times have a way of gradually fading into oblivion as they should.

Let us take one episode in the life of the City of Marion as an example. Last Saturday, May 29th, marked the 28th anniversary of the greatest catastrophe in the history of Marion. Ironically the tornado struck in the midst of preparation for Memorial Day.

It should be of interest to determine how many among us remembered. I dare say the number would be limited to those who lost friend or relative and those who were among the hundreds who were injured.

It is proper such experience should dim with the passage of time because life must go on. Even after the memory of the event has faded certain fundamental truths remain. We should continue to be thankful the disaster was not worse. We should continue to be thankful the recovery was so rapid and so complete. And, we should never forget that life on this earth is fragile. We can hope to see the light of day tomorrow but there is no guarantee.

As we honor those who perished in the service of our country we cannot help thinking about what might have been had their lives been spared.

Each of us has had a friend, perhaps a relative, who was in the full bloom of youth. The flame of the future was burning bright. Then in a twinkling the flame was extinguished. Plans that were beginning to form had no chance to mature. The good things that could have come from a vibrant life never materialized.

We can only speculate about the good that could have been, the contributions that could have made a difference had the life been spared.

Every year I attend this ceremony and every year I recall the faces of so many friends who bore the struggle only to never return to their homes.

If there is such a thing as a good war it is a war fought for the right reason and ends in victory. In that way World War II was a good war. Win or Lose the cost was unconscionable. That is one reason to hate that and any war.

For many years after World War II Gold Star Mothers, mothers of fallen heroes attended this annual ceremony faithfully with pride. Their presence was a reminder the price of victory continued to accumulate long after the last shot was fired.

We lament, as we should, the untimely passing of those whose blood was soaked into the earth of fields of battle in foreign and strange places. But we know the world is undergoing change. This was brought home to us in horrendous fashion on Saturday 11 when our nation suffered the greatest loss of life on American soil at the hands of an enemy since Pearl Harbor.

We now know, if there has been any doubt the United States is under attack at home and abroad by an irrational and implacable foe. This is a conflict we cannot avoid, a struggle not of our choosing but one we will confront and ultimately win. There will be, as always, a cost to be paid. There is no alternative.

Sadly but realistically we recognize that in the future on this day at this ceremony additional names will appear on the roster of those who gave their all for their country.

Always there is the question “Why must this be?” Always there is the answer, “Perhaps it is God’s will.”

Everything that happens in this life has a purpose. Often we cannot know what that purpose is. We must believe that right will prevail and the sacrifice endured will not have been in vain.

Just as those patriots in the beginning engaged in a struggle with a tyrant we find ourselves engaged in a conflict with an even more pernicious tyranny. In the name of their religion the new tyrants do not want to subdue us. They want to destroy our people, our nation and all it stands for.

If we are to truly honor the memory of all those who have preceded us in the march to our destiny, we must face the challenge with which we are confronted with unyielding resolve. We should give thanks to God Almighty for the privilege of living in the home of the brave and the land of the free.

We must ask ourselves “What are we to do? We should remember with gratitude those who have served our nation so valiantly. We must comfort those who have lost a loved one to the God of War. We must never forsake the eternal and fundamental truths that are the foundation of our nation. Assuredly then we must conduct our lives responsibly if we are to measure up to the heroic conduct of the men and women serving in the armed services.

Finally, let us go forth from this place determined to follow the admonition to love one another as we love ourselves. By so doing we honor in the noblest manner those whose lives we remember today.

Thank you.
Mayor Bob Butler