

MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS

(GREETINGS TO OTHER DIGNITARIES)

THANK YOU ALL for coming together on this MEMORIAL DAY to share in the honorable RITUAL OF REMEMBERING.

While we few pause in this ONE PARTICULAR TIME AND PLACE for mourning, WE ARE UNITED with grief-stricken hearts in many OTHER PLACES today. We know that countless eyes are filling with tears elsewhere, and beautiful flowers are lying before stones marking PRECIOUS LIVES LOST.

Some of us will stand around FRESH GRAVES where grass has not yet covered the wound in the earth. OTHERS WILL KNEEL at the base of a BRILLIANT BLACK WALL in our nation's capital and reach up to touch the letters of a name inscribed there. Across that same memorial mall in Washington, some of us will circle the sculpted soldiers on patrol in full combat gear, remembering those Americans whose last steps fell heavily on Korean soil. Nearby at the Lincoln Memorial, dwarfed by the presence of our 16th President, other citizens will still consider the devastation borne by their ancestors on both sides of a war that CHANGED OUR COUNTRY FOREVER -- as each war changes our country forever. All of these people, along with us, will still MARVEL AT THE COURAGE required to rise up and defeat any and all threats to DEMOCRACY'S HIGHEST IDEALS.

From sea to shining sea today, as we both CONFRONT and are COMFORTED BY our memories, WE ARE ALL CONNECTED.

WE ARE CONNECTED with the widows young and old, with the Gold Star mothers and fathers, the grandmother, grandfathers, the toddlers and the teenage sons and daughters of today's soldiers. WE ARE CONNECTED with men and women, friends and families still mourning lost lives taken by previous wars from which we have not recovered.

WE REMEMBER the families who faced funerals last week, last month or last year, who are foremost in our prayers. Their memories are so terribly fresh. We ask for them strength and comfort. We know they have an abundance of pride and courage. WE UNDERSTAND THEIR SUFFERING, for some of us have walked through the darkest valleys of the shadow of death.

Whether the names of the dead still live on the tongues of loved ones or reside only in silence on listing tombstones in abandoned cemeteries, we gather to honor EACH AND EVERY ONE.

WE REMEMBER the veterans young and old haunted by their own gruesome memories and by the faces of fellow soldiers taken out by one enemy or another.

WE REMEMBER the lost soldiers themselves, cut down while valiantly fighting for their beloved homeland, their communities and families.

WE REMEMBER those communities and families who struggle to go forward without them, who descend a path of sorrow.

And MOST IMPORTANTLY, we remember to LOOK UP FOR A LIGHT TO GUIDE US NOW. We ask to receive and to give comfort, that it may flow through us to the ones we seek to serve. We strive to REMAIN STEADFAST in our DETERMINATION TO "HONOR THE DEAD BY HELPING THE LIVING."

We TAKE STRENGTH in our belief in the POWER OF LOVE, in ACTING OUT OUR CARE AND CONCERN through the programs and activities of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. For that is our best hope for TRUE TRIUMPH.

"In our time, as in every age, WE NEED TO SEE SOMETHING which is STRONGER THAN DEATH," as Paul Tillich wrote. "Death has become powerful in our time, in individual human beings, in families, in nations and in mankind as a whole...IT IS LOVE, human and divine, which OVERCOMES DEATH in nations and generations and in all the horror of our time.

“Help has become almost impossible in the face of the monstrous powers which we are experiencing. Death is given power over everything finite, especially in our period of history.

“But death is given NO POWER over love. LOVE IS STRONGER. It creates something NEW out of the destruction caused by death; it BEARS EVERYTHING and OVERCOMES EVERYTHING. It is at work where the power of death is strongest, in war and persecution and homelessness and hunger and physical death itself.

“It is OMNIPRESENT and here and there, in the smallest and most hidden ways as in the greatest and most visible ones, IT RESCUES LIFE FROM DEATH. It rescues EACH OF US, for LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH.”

May we carry this knowledge CLOSE TO OUR HEARTS. May we SHARE IT WITH OTHERS on this MEMORIAL DAY and EVERY DAY HEREAFTER.