

Bishop's Letter for Memorial Day Observance

26 May 2014, Anno Domini (in the 238th year of our Declaration of Independence)

We remember with deep appreciation today those fine young red-blooded Americans who have laid down their lives in defense of our freedoms, and even those of others whom they knew not. From the hot, humid jungles of the South Pacific; to the snow-clad fields of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany; and more recently the deserts and mountain heights of Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, the American soldier has paid the price, in blood, that can only preserve a nation's freedoms. The blood of despots will do little in that regard – only the blood of free men can nourish the national liberties of a free people.



As we observe in the current world of politics, governments soon forget the debt owed to valor in times of peace when they were so eager to have it in time of war. We erect Stones of Remembrance to perpetuate the memory of these heroes at arms. Though the Stones may serve to remind us that they have lived, the Stones of granite and marble cannot express the loss of the treasures of the heart of so many fallen emissaries of liberty. *Bivouac Of The Dead* written by Theodore O'Hara in memory of the Kentucky troops killed in the Mexican War in 1847 sums up only a part of the meaning of this day:

BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldier's last tattoo;
No more on Life's parade shall meet
That brave and fallen few.

On Fame's eternal camping ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And glory guards, with solemn round,
The bivouac of the dead.



“Greater love has no man than this – that he lay down his life for his friends.” When we have resisted evil to the shedding of blood, there can be no question of our devotion to righteousness and freedom. We perhaps should also take note of those valiant soldiers, sailors, and airmen, who, had the sacrifice been required, would have just as readily laid down their lives in behalf of a free and Christian nation.



Though most memorial markers are made of stone or brass, there is one which survives every Memorial Day commemorating life rather than death while yet memorializing the heroic sacrifice of our soldiers – the Poppies of the field of Verdun at Flanders:

IN FLANDERS FIELDS
by John McCrae, May 1915

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly

Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Flowers always grace the graves of heroes. Remember their sacrifice in the blood-red flower of Flanders, and pray that God will preserve us a free nation among the nations of the earth and turn our hearts back to our Maker.