

Bishop's Letter for Memorial Day Observance 27 May 2013, Anno Domini (in the 237<sup>th</sup> year of our Declaration of Independence)



*1 And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, 2 Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, 3 And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: 5 And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: 6 That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? 7 Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever. (Josh 4:1-7)*

Last Spring, I had the honor and privilege to visit the World War II Memorial overlooking the placid Sound of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. The day was one of lush Spring life and pristine skies. But Guadalcanal was not always such a peaceful place. It was once a place of where the thunder of heavy Naval and air bombardments occurred in the Fall of 1942 and continued to early winter of 1943. Huge, lumbering battleships, loaded with the ordnance of war, fought desperately one of the greatest Naval engagements in our history. Beneath the now-peaceful waters of Guadalcanal Sound lie, in watery graves, scores of both American and Japanese battleships – so

many that the locals refer to Guadalcanal as "Iron Bottom Sound." U.S. Marine and Army ground forces fought costly battles in taking Henderson Airfield from the Japanese. It is a bit disappointing to observe how poorly maintained are the memorials and graves of the American and Allied Forces on Guadalcanal compared to the smart Japanese memorial only a few hundred yards away.

What great and compelling purpose brought young American and Allied soldiers, airmen, and sailors to this distant island in the Pacific. The bedrock of their cause was freedom and liberty. It would have been incomprehensible to suffer the enemy's assault on American soil without immediate and overwhelming reprisal. The American man-at-arms has always been devoted to the preservation and defense of freedom everywhere his boot touches the soil.

Considering the stone statues, brass grave markers and white crosses at the Memorial at Guadalcanal, my mind wandered to the heights of Arlington, of Flanders, of Colleville-sur-Mer (Omaha Beach), Aisne-Marne (France), the Ardennes & Henri-Chapel (Belgium), of Gettysburg, Golden Gate, and more than one hundred and forty other National Military Cemeteries in the continental United States; one is prompted to wonder "*What mean ye by these stones?*" What heroic and gallant souls are represented by these markers. These are mostly men of youth who were just coming into their manhood. They rallied to the colors of a grateful nation under attack from powers that knew nothing of freedom and liberty – only merciless power and oppression. Almost to a soul, these were men who worshipped our God in the beauty of holiness. Such were the men and women who defined what America was - all the way to their cross-marked graves on national and foreign fields. These men are the noble and upright ghosts of America Past. How did we ever produce men of such valor and courage? How will we ever deserve the liberty and security that their sacrifice purchased for us?

It is clearly a biblical imperative that we remember the heroes of our nation, and pay due honor and respect to such heroes. And how shall we do that? By emulating their characters and loving the principles of God and Country which they so handsomely represented.

As we have collectively forgotten the price of freedom, the shadows of fear and oppression have appeared on the far shores of the Beautiful Land for which these men bled and died. Shall we allow that specter to grow? Or shall we turn again to the God of our Fathers and seek His face in repentance and prayer? Shall the flag of our nation be found, in future years, covered in the sands and dust of time – not proudly waving, but discarded as a worthless rag? Remember the courageous words of Patrick Henry: *Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren, till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation?* And he closed his comments thusly: *The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable -- and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!*

*It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, "Peace! Peace!" -- but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!* (Patrick Henry - March 23, 1775)

Make no mistake, fellow Christians and Americans, we are engaged in a war today just as threatening to our freedoms as that war of sword and cannon of 1776. The ammunition employed by the enemy is lies, propaganda, and youthful indoctrination. But in the arsenal of the Christian patriot are the shore batteries and impenetrable ramparts of truth – and the Author of all Truth.

Let us remember with reverence, this Memorial Day, those heroic young souls who purchased our liberty at such great cost. But let us also resolve, this day, to be just as ardent in the maintenance of that Liberty as these gallant men were in their unqualified defense of it.