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Honoring Deceased Members of Fraternal Order of Elks Lodge

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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We meet today in memory and in honor of those members of the Elks lodge who have passed to their eternal reward. They were our fathers, our brothers, and our friends and to them we owe a debt we can never repay. They lived for democracy, fought for it, each in his own way, and practiced it so that we -- who remain behind temporarily -- can continue in the rights and privileges which they loved so much and treasured so dearly. Their heritage to us is something which we shall forever cherish because it is our connection with them. They gave their lives as truly as any soldier on the field of battle and they exemplified in their persons that duty to God and country so characteristic of the membership of this great fraternal order. We can say of them that "it was their hourly care, as men and Americans, to do that which their hands findeth to do with carefulness, unaffected dignity, humanity, freedom and justice."

In other countries, other people have different means of honoring their departed but in all of them this recognition has been given whole-heartedly. Since time immemorial man has seen fit to render some sort of tribute to those who were no longer with them. We find, for example, that the Mayan Indians of Central America garbed their dead in fine garments, stored utensils of various kinds in the burial place and sacrificed a dog for the occasion. The utensils were to give to the deceased a continuation of the things to which he had become accustomed; the garments were to keep him warm on his journey; and the dog was to lead his master along the path and into the land to where all good people go. In China the policy of ancestor veneration has been in practice for over 2500 yrs. and the memories of those who have passed away are never forgotten. Rather the good which they performed was always remembered and the institution of the family was forever aware of the honor to be accorded to its members.

All this is indicative of the fact that what we are today doing
here is only a continuation of that custom which has pervaded the lives of all men, in all countries, in all times. To participate in a ceremony of this kind is not only an honor for all of us but it is a small way to show our appreciation for those who have given us so much.

In honoring them we are honoring ourselves and we are keeping alive the ties of humanity which can be likened to a never-ending chain. All of those who comprised the links in this chain were not without fault, but it is perhaps because of their faults that we appreciate their virtues the more. Man was not born to be perfect— that is God's prerogative only— but man has continually striven toward perfection. The frailties which characterized our departed comrades are the frailties of those still left behind. In the works of the Order's initiation we should "write the faults of our brothers on the sands and their virtues on the tablets of love and memory."

It is not difficult for us to remember them with kindness and charity, for we can say with Longfellow:

\[
\text{We may build more splendid habitations,}
\]
\[
\text{Fill our rooms with paintings and with sculptures,}
\]
\[
\text{But we cannot}
\]
\[
\text{Buy with gold the old associations!}
\]

We like to remember them as men who, joining this great fraternity of Elks— were moved with the desire to be of service to their fellow citizens. In putting into practice the teachings of this Order they made of themselves better men and contributed greatly to the welfare of their community, state and nation. They assumed obligations not because of the personal benefits to be derived, but because of the aid and comfort they could give their comrades. They endeavored to bring about better understandings, closer companionships. As citizens it was their constant duty to answer their country's needs and, in so doing, they tried to keep alive in this land the principles of peace, freedom, and equality.

I can think of no better way to show our respect to our dead or our
duty to ourselves and to the future citizens of our country than to continue to live up to the ideals of charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity which motivated the lives of these departed members being honored today. It seems to me that the very foundation of our lives and nation depend on the practice of such ideals. Today with our democracy being threatened on all sides, it is imperative that we live in bonds of closer understanding and unanimity. We have many problems to solve, internal ones which will take our greatest efforts; and external ones which make us apprehensive. At the present time the world is engaged in another war, and although we are not active participants in it, we are affected by the struggle. We Americans of today—like those of former years—stand for peace because we feel that only in preserving peace can we preserve democracy. The best way to serve democracy is to keep it alive in this country so that a war weary world can in time return to its standard. It is our duty to the world and to our absent fellows to maintain such a standard.

Charity begins at home, they say; democracy, likewise begins at home. To be democratic in our individual daily lives, to live and let live, to practice charity and tolerance, to allow free speech, the practice of one's own religion, and freedom of organization and assembly— are some of the ways that you and I individually can work for democracy. The form of government which our departed members worked will therefore continue to stand.

These comrades of ours lived for the things they believed in and they died knowing that theirs was a job well done. Some of them came to our land from different parts of the world seeking the principles of liberty, equality, and justice—ideals which have long been the heritage of those of us who were born in America. In this great land of ours they found what they sought, and true to the ideals of this great fraternity of Elks, their efforts and abilities made contributions which we can be well proud of and which we can never forget. Remember that the American
proud of and which we can never forget. Remember that the America in which we now live is a result of the work of those who have gone before us. How gratified you must feel that many of these were of your brotherhood. This America with its freedom, opportunities, and peace is the triumph of their endeavors.

It is inherent in the nature of man to feel his own immortality. That our departed comrades still live on is a belief that all Christians adhere to. We feel therefore that they can, from that eternal land to which they have gone but where they still live, look back upon their handiwork with pride, and we can look to them with a feeling of gratitude and appreciation. We are humble in the knowledge of our debt to them. If we can realize that they have, after living useful lives, gone to their reward in a land far better than any we have ever known, and if we can use their example to spur us on in our efforts to develop, beautify, and ennoble our lives, then this occasion need not be one entirely of sadness. Let us see in this beautiful memorial service of today, encouragement, hope, and inspiration. In the words of the poet Joyce Kilmer, I should like to greet the departed ones:

"Farewell!

Comrades true, born anew, peace to you!
Your souls shall be where the heroes are
And your memory shine like the morning-star.
Brave and dear,
Shield us her.
Farewell!"