



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21057

Remembrance Sunday, Trinity XXIV, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## ✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son And of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

Paradoxically, despite America's deep disdain for militarism, the United States is the greatest military power upon earth. And it is perhaps an even greater paradox that we owe this to the virtue that makes America so resolutely anti-militaristic – its regard for the worth of each and every individual.

This tender regard for the individual is not mere happenstance. We owe it to our English heritage, and not just to our English heritage generally, but specifically to the attitudes and understandings bestowed upon us by our Anglican Faith.

Our laws are based upon English Common Law – a body of law that evolved out of a peculiarly English attitude towards the Christian faith. It is an attitude more than a little at odds with our modern interpretations of the concept of the separation of church and state.

Common Law was forged in an age when the idea that it was possible to separate people's spiritual lives from their secular lives would have been considered quite preposterous. When the Venerable Bede, for example, wrote his History of the English Church and People, the term "Church and People" was, to all intents and purposes, a single word: the people were the church and the church was the people. This concept of the indivisibility of life spiritual and secular exerted a powerful influence on our legal system – a system unique in that it presumes, among other things, people innocent until they

have been judged guilty by twelve of their equals.

This is a presumption that only makes sense as an act of Christian charity. After all, the reason people are put on trial in the first place is they are believed to be guilty. The presumption of innocence, however, however is merely a single manifestation of this unique understanding of people as brothers and sisters under the authority of a loving God. It is from this understanding of the human condition that America's unique concept of individual worth springs.

It was by no means a fortuitous accident that the founding fathers proclaimed each and every one of us to be endowed by God our Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our rights are a direct consequence of the ancient vision of people as brothers and sisters, equally beloved of a loving God.

Along with rights, of course, come responsibilities, chief among which is the duty of each of us to participate to the best of our ability in our common defense. Peace and freedom have never been cheap commodities. And the price of the peace and freedom the United States offers its citizens today has been bought and paid for with the blood, sweat, tears and sacrifice of generations of brave Americans, native born and immigrant.

To begin at the beginning, we should give thanks for the courage and fortitude of those early

settlers who tamed the wilderness. We should remember with gratitude those who upheld the cause of freedom before there ever was a United States of America – farmers and tradesmen who left hearth and home to fight the French and Indian Wars. Without their sacrifice the United States would have been stillborn, and America would have remained the plaything of the European powers.

We should give thanks for those who fought for independence – the militia at Bunker Hill, Ticonderoga and Trenton; the Continental Line at Yorktown. And, along with the victories, we ought to remember the debacles, like the Battle of Brooklyn Heights. Nor should we forget those who gave their lives fighting against the cause of independence. But, while the Tories had a different vision of America, they, too, are part of our heritage. They taught us to be magnanimous in victory and unbowed by defeat.

Most particularly, we should give thanks for George Washington, the farmer and part-time soldier whose determination and sound commonsense confounded the best military minds the Old World had to offer. And no less important, in an age when republican government was an entirely novel concept, he had the strength of character to reject the crown and to insist that government of the people should be by the people. Largely thanks to Washington, the American Revolution is the only revolution in history that did not consume its children.

The path has by no means always been smooth: A century and a half ago brothers were fighting brother – men of honest intentions and diametrically opposed vision. Artisans and clerks from the North who left workshops and counting houses to fight their way through withering Confederate fire in the Wilderness Campaign; Southern farm boys who gallantly charged the Federal lines at Gettysburg. The North prevailed, but who cannot admire the integrity of a man like Robert E. Lee – an abolitionist who freed his slaves, but whose conscience compelled him to fight for the “country” of his birth to uphold the

right of states to manage their own affairs.

A century has passed since American soldiers shed American blood on American soil. Yet this has not stemmed the flow of American blood in defense of smaller, weaker nations, guaranteeing them the freedom we so highly cherish. Doughboys marched with Pershing to into the poppy fields of Flanders. The people of Europe owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be adequately repaid.

A scant twenty years later, others fought their way across Europe and Asia: Anzio, Normandy, Guadalcanal, the Bataan Peninsula. The men of our Navy and Merchant Marine fought and died at Midway, as well as in the Atlantic, the Pacific, the horrors of the Archangelsk convoys. Thousand upon thousands lie under neat white stones, each with a cross or Star of David. Many more lie in graves that will never be known.

In Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan, young Americans have given their lives in the cause of freedom. The somber sight of flag-draped caskets arriving at Andrews Air Force Base serves to remind us that there is a heavy price to pay for keeping faith with the vision of those who founded this great land.

John Philpot Curran declared the price of liberty to be eternal vigilance. But it's also important to remember Thomas Jefferson's chilling observation that the tree of liberty needs to be regularly watered with the blood of tyrants . . . and patriots. It is a terrible thought, but history repeatedly demonstrates the truth of it.

Love is the essence of Jesus' Gospel. He told us the way we should demonstrate the depth and sincerity of our love for God is by loving our fellow men as much as we love ourselves. And he amplified it with this saying: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And it is this that America should be remembering with heartfelt thanks today. *AMEN.*