

22nd Annual Peace Officers' Memorial Service

May 15, 2003

National President Chuck Canterbury's Memorial Speech

Mr. President, Members of Congress, honored guests, my fellow officers, and especially you, the families of those men and women we honor here today, welcome to the 22nd Annual National Peace Officers' Memorial Service. On behalf of the Grand Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police and the Grand Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police Auxiliary, we want to say that we appreciate your attendance and we hope that the tribute we tender is accepted with as much honor, love and respect as we offer it here today.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Life brings sorrow and joys alike. It is what a man does with them...not what they do to him that is the true test of his mettle." The names called here today have demonstrated their mettle and we can all be proud of their service to our great nation. It is our responsibility to look adversity in the eye and to say, "We can overcome our grief, we will persevere and we will honor and cherish the memories given to us by these heroes and we will do this with soften hearts and guarded optimism."

The men and women that we stand here today to honor have demonstrated their character, their devotion and have proven their ultimate measure. They gave all a law enforcement officer can give—their lives. They faced challenges, they accepted risks and they knew very well that their duty could force upon them an environment that threatened their dreams. Yet they went to work every day.

What made them persevere? What motivated their daily challenge to the unruly and threatening influences of our day? What prompted them to gamble their dreams for little tangible reward? Was it their spirit of adventure? Was it their dread of the mundane? Was it the excitement and danger of the profession? Certainly these factors combined in some fashion to contribute to their accepted risks, but the willingness of a law enforcement officer to risk personal safety goes much deeper than superficial reasoning.

They were special people. They were people with high standards of commitment. And they were people who realized that their jobs had to be done by those who felt an honest and compelling concern for their fellow man. They were people who looked at overwhelming challenge and saw opportunity. They were people who believed that justice was within grasp of a hard day's work. They were people from whom fate demanded an example of posterity.

It is our charge, as family members, fellow law enforcement officers, friends and citizens to remember their legacy, to burn into our hearts forever a commitment similar to that possessed by those we honor here today. Our challenges remain ominous, our dedication unwavering and our duty remains essential to the ideals worthy of the lives of those we now remember.

The loss of a police officer reminds us all of our own humanity, our mortality and the peculiar, yet infinitely special kind of person it takes to be a police officer. At the 20th Annual Memorial Service, President Bush said, "I honestly believe good officers are called by God." I believe that, too, Mr. President. And this year, too many officers were called into God's army of angels.

I've always been proud to be a police officer. I have always thought it a noble profession. It is often difficult to explain why and to verbalize the feelings you have about the job we do and the men and women who do it. But on days like today—when we come together as a family to honor our fallen brothers and sisters—It is easy to be proud. I am proud of them and I am proud of you, their families. It is important for all of us to never forget the courage, the devotion to service and the love they had for their fellow officers, but more especially the love they had for you, their families.

The mission of the Fraternal Order of Police has always been to improve the conditions in which we must all work and this service is dedicated not only to those who have gone on before us, but those who will follow in our footsteps. In no other profession is the tie that binds as closely knit as in the law enforcement family. The "thin blue line" is an unbreakable tie that is as special as the Spirit of America.

President John Adams once said, "Grief drives men to serious reflection, sharpens the understanding and softens the heart." Today, as we prepare to honor your loved ones, my prayer is that this memorial will help to heal your hearts and let you know that we will never forget the sacrifice of these American heroes.

Mr. President, I want to thank you for your commitment to all Americans during these troubled times, but more especially I want to thank you for your support for these families and for the Law Enforcement Community. May God Bless these families, our troops overseas and our brothers and sisters in law enforcement who are protecting us all now and most of all May God Bless America.