

Veterans For God and Country

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Introduction:

Today, my friends, is a day of remembrance of our contributions as veterans for God and for country. We who are gathered here today in this historic church of Saint Paul the Apostle may not all be veterans of the military – but we all are called to become veterans of “God and country.”

In our reflections today, I will highlight the ultimate life as a veteran and role model for God and country with several examples, the first of which is St. Paul himself. We will also look at the life of Saint Martin of Tours, a soldier for “God and country” as well as the examples of recent veterans of God and country such as Father Emil Kaupaun, a POW, who died in North Korea and Father Vincent Capodanno, who died in Vietnam. These last two are truly veterans for God and country and both have been proposed for beatification and are currently identified as “Servants of God.”

Today

Today, November 11th, as our nation observes a day of remembrance in honor of those who have served and/or are serving in some capacity within our armed forces, we look both backwards and forward to tomorrow’s veterans of “God and country”.

Since the revolutionary war, more than 39 million American men and women have served in the armed forces. Out of these, more than one million have died so that we might enjoy the freedom that we have today.

Esther Schober in her poem entitled **Salute to our Veterans**” ... writes:

Here’s a salute to the army men and women in khaki brown;
Here’s to the lads with marching feet,
As the caissons go rolling along;
Here’s a salute to the navy, decked in blue and white;
Here’s to the lads of the naval fleet, with anchors away to the fight.
Here’s a salute to the brave marines, fighting on land and sea,
Here’s to the lads that are always glad to give life for liberty.
Here’s a salute to those who fly,
Lads with an upward swing;
Here’s to the one’s with colors true;
As up to the blue they wing.
Give a salute for the veterans, cheering for one and all;
Give a salute for their courage true; God be with them –
One and all!

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Our first reading from Scripture this morning is found in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Here within our biblical text we find the apostle Paul, a soldier and a veteran for God and for country, speaking to Timothy. Possibly, there is no better example of a veteran “for God and country” than the apostle Paul. Again, while we cannot all be military veterans, we can all be veterans “for God and for country”.

How do you and I become veterans for “God and for country”? Here within our text we find four different ways to become such a veteran:

Prepare Yourself for Death

2 Timothy 4:6: “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”

As a veteran for God and for country, Paul faced death on many occasions. As a child of God, he was prepared to die.

I have been on the battlefields of Iraq five times. I was at the Pentagon on 9/11. The rectory where I was living in Laurel, Maryland, exploded and totally burned to the ground in the Spring of 2006. In sixteen days, I will depart Germany for a military deployment to Afghanistan where I will serve once again as an Army chaplain, on the battlefield. Often times I am asked, are you not afraid to die? My answer: as long as I am participating in the will of God, no harm will ever come to me – nothing can or will separate me from the love of Christ and love of country. We must always and in all ways prepare ourselves for death as veterans for God and for country.

I wonder this morning, are you ready or prepared for death as a veteran for “God and for country?”

Paul was ready, because he had accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior. He was ready because he had repented of his sins. He was ready because he had been baptized and was serving the Lord to the best of his ability. Because Jesus died for us and rose from the grave, our fear of death can be changed to hope. That’s the best way to face our inevitable appointment with death.

Fight the Good Fight.

2 Timothy 4:7a “I have fought the good fight.”

The world has changed drastically since both my dad and mom stood their ground in military uniforms, against the enemy in World War II. My dad was in the Navy and my mom, a Sergeant in the Marine Corps. Back then, they and their brave comrades fought against nations that were threatening to destroy any country that dared stand in their way. Many of them were wounded and many died.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who fought in all wars and in all conflicts. Their bravery issued from a cause they believed in --- a mission they were willing to die for. They understood that if they did not go overseas, many people would lose their freedom, or even their lives, under the rule of ruthless dictators and terrorists. Hopefully, these battle grounds, today, are diminishing.

As a veteran for “God and for country,” Paul had stood “toe to toe” against the enemy of the world. As a child of God, Paul was not a conscientious objector who refused to fight; but rather he entered the service of the Lord on a full time basis. As a veteran for God and country, Paul used the armor of God in battle.

Finish the Course:

2 Timothy 4:7b “I have finished the race.”

This is the third pillar of our four points on how to become for tomorrow, a veteran for God and country.

As a veteran for God and country, Paul was not one who gave up or surrendered to the enemy. Nor did he forget or ignore his own people.

Today we find many who have entered the Christian race but soon afterwards quit and dropped out. The veteran apostle Paul indicated that those who run well the race towards freedom are characterized by self-control and self-discipline and a profound care for and about others.

As you look forward to tomorrow -- do you want to earn an imperishable crown as a veteran for God and country? Then wait on the Lord. Practice self-control. Lay aside sinful burdens. These are the secrets of running well.

We must all become involved – we must not ignore the silent suffering of untold numbers of American veterans while substance abuse, family breakdowns, domestic violence, homelessness and suicide rates among our veteran ranks steadily rise. Although only about 7% of Americans have served in the U.S. military, veterans account for 20% of suicides in this country. In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs, estimate that veterans make up about one-fifth of the homeless population. As veterans for “God and country,” we must provide better care for our veterans of yesterday.

Keep the Faith.

2 Timothy 4:7c: “I have kept the faith.”

The faith refers to those teachings, doctrines and traditions that have been entrusted to the Lord’s church to be preserved and handed down from generation to generation.

Who will be the future veterans for God and country?

In our day and time when many people are departing from the faith, distorting it and compromising it, there is a genuine need for us to keep the faith and to contend for it.

I wonder how many of us have compromised with the enemy?

This story is told about a soldier during the civil war who figured he would play it safe. He dressed himself in a blue coat and gray pants and then tiptoed out onto the battle field and then got shot from both directions!

How we finish the race as veterans for God and country depends to a great extent on the pace we set along the way. Joseph Witting remarked that when we write people's biographies, we should start with their death, not their birth. After all, we have nothing to do with the way our life began, but we have a lot to do with the way it ends.

We too can end the Christian race well as veterans of tomorrow, even if we began late, started slow, or faltered along the way. The secret is to stay true to Christ to the last moment.

The beatitudes in Matthew's gospel we heard proclaimed just moments ago, is that road map – the GPS – that compass --- that leads us to become true veterans of God and country.

In the USA, the highest reward a military veteran can receive is the Congressional Medal of Honor. As true veterans of "God and country" – one day our commander-in-chief will reward us with an even greater reward -- the crown of eternal life.

As the first veteran for "God and for country" – Paul was ----

- prepared to die
- fought the good fight
- finished the course while taking care of others
- kept the faith.

Can these same things be said of you on this Veterans Day, 2011?