

As we gather together this evening I ask that, for just a few moments, you put aside the everyday concerns of the world, focus your thoughts and your gaze upon the flag that you see before you. The words that follow are mine, and although they are not the words of a veteran of military service, they are indeed the deep-seated feelings from the heart of a proud, loyal and thankful American citizen.

This is a time of year that we celebrate and remember. With recent events of Memorial Day, D-Day, and Flag Day, and of course Independence Day on the horizon, this is a time we set aside to honor those that protect and serve, and remember those that paid the ultimate sacrifice so that you and I can assemble here without fear. One strong symbol that weaves its way through all of these dates that I've mentioned is Old Glory, the beautiful symbol you see before you tonight.

The 'Stars and Stripes' officially became America's flag on June 14th, 1777 by declaration of Congress. Since that time its stars and stripes of red, white and blue have led us into battle against some terrible foes, helped us overcome fear, and establish a lasting freedom for us and those generations to follow. The stars have gradually increased in number while the USA was being born, and have now grown to 50. It is a highflying symbol that has impressed upon people around the world the fact that we enjoy the freedoms of truth and justice. It still beckons to those who desire to have those freedoms.

This flag is the symbol of a great nation; to the American people it's a symbol of their *strength*, *endurance*, and their *will* to survive and be free. Their *strength* has been woven into the flag by thousands of men and women who have paid the ultimate price on the field of battle, here and on foreign soil, so that you and I can stand here today proud and free, as we honor our heritage and their sacrifices. Those who remained at home to suffer the pain and loss of a loved one have sowed America's *endurance* into our flag. Our *will* has been co-mingled with the very fabric of this ensign by ordinary people who were willing to step forward in the face of danger to become our nation's heroes.

If there are nations or individual terrorists that think they can bring this country to its knees by destroying our buildings and monuments, they are mistaken! For those structures are made only of steel, glass, mortar and stone. This flag was crafted from a much stronger and durable material. This flag represents a nation of not just one people; it is people of many nations who are bound together so deeply by its fabric that it will never be destroyed.

I found these words of Oliver Wendell Holmes appropriate for this occasion. I have borrowed them from '*The Voyage of the Good Ship Union*' Stanza 12. Those words are, "One flag, one land, one heart, one hand, One Nation, evermore!"

Brother Marshal, under the escort of the Senior and Junior Deacons, present the flag of our country at the altar. (WM: wrap the lodge up). I ask that you please assume a proper salute to our flag. All citizens of the United States will join me in pledging allegiance to the flag of our country. 'I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all'. Brother Marshal, post the colors.