Address at Elks Club memorial ceremony for departed members

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS BY J. STROM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AT ELKS CLUB MEMORIAL CEREMONY FOR DEPARTED MEMBERS, ROCK HILL, S. C., DECEMBER 4, 1949.

We are gathered under the wise and proper dictum of this order to fulfill our unanimous desire for a fitting and dignified memorial to those of our brothers who are no longer among us, and whose earthly forms can never again attend our altar.

This is a solemn hour— a time of Sorrow and of Memory for our lodge. It is a time that softens the hearts of all Elk brothers everywhere, no matter where they may be. It is a time that reminds every brother of the order that he is never forgotten and never forsaken, whether he is living among men, or whether he has passed through the mystic veil into eternity beyond.

Today we mourn those whose names have been called three times without reply in the beautiful symbolism of our beloved ritual. It is only in our hearts that we hear their response, for now they answer only to the "Mystic Roll Call of Those Who Will Come No More."

Our first thoughts on this occasion must be thoughts of sympathy with the families of those we mourn. We extend our heartfelt condolences to these bereaved ones. Their hearts are still torn by the wounds of parting, and the shock of grief that must come to us all has scarcely left them. There is little real
comfort that we can give them, except the knowledge that they do not grieve alone, but in the company of countless friends. For their loss is our loss, and we share with them the comforting hope and belief that death is not a final thing, but a beginning of a finer and nobler existence beyond the veil of earthly cares.

The beautiful ritual ceremony of Elkdom, given in memoriam to departed members, has a special meaning for those who will seek it out. It offers a fitting testimony to the essential worth and dignity of mankind, by emphasizing the intrinsic value of the personal being and the individual soul. Such testimonials are needed, and sorely needed, in a world which seemingly grows every day more callous and indifferent toward the qualities of mankind which set him apart from the beasts, and permit him to live humbly in the image of God.

It is proper, therefore, that we should gather now in reverence to the memory of those who have died, for in so doing, we are testifying to the value of human life. We are demonstrating our high regard for the precious qualities that live in the heart and soul of every individual. And we are herewith offering a denial to those of this world who hold that human life is cheap, and that the individual counts for nothing.

There are many such in the world in which we live today.
They are spreading a philosophy of life which holds that man has no value as an individual, and that all the personal traits of character should be crushed and forgotten. As members of the Elks and as Americans, we are unalterably opposed to such a belief.

On the contrary, we believe that the human soul is a priceless thing. Our belief is that every person should be loved and cherished for himself -- for what he is, what he thinks, and what he does.

That is why we are constrained to gather today for this ceremony. It is our belief that each one of our departed brothers was a sacred being, to be cherished forever in respectful memory.

It is only by means of our respect for the dignity of the individual man that we can hope to fulfill our true missions here on earth. Then when we lie down at last to rest we may say, "I have run the good race, I have kept the faith." When respect for the individual is lost, man will have yielded along with it his God-given faith in the eternity of the human soul, and he will have become little better than the beasts of the field.

Those who have "passed into the light which is beyond the shadow of death" are no longer with us in the flesh; but in a very real sense, they still abide with us.
in spirit. Abraham Lincoln once said that "to live in the hearts of those we leave behind is not to die." This truth is one of the most cherished precepts of Elkhon. There are vacant chairs here today, and they bring us sadness, but there is no vacancy in our hearts and minds. We are poorer for the passing of our friends and brothers, but we are enriched by the memory in which they still live.

Those whom we mourn today sought earnestly through life to uphold and exalt the great principles of our Order -- charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity. With the brief existence allotted to them on this earthly plane, they wrote the record of their lives in letters which can never be erased. They built their own monuments of memory, and wrote upon them epitaphs of their individual worth and character which are more lasting than stone or mortar. We may exaggerate their virtues and lessen their faults, but we cannot add to or subtract from the record they have written in our hearts. Once written, this record must stand through all the ages, for the seal of death has imparted to it the eternity of absolute verity.

Nothing we can do now will add to the record of their lives. But we can recall that this record lives within us, in our hearts,
as much a part of us as any thought that we may have. For this reason, we can extend and perpetuate on earth the lives of our departed friends, by transplanting their highest principles and their best efforts into our own lives.

I think it was the Athenian orator, Pericles, who, when he delivered a memorial to those who died in battle, said that men should not be honored in words alone, but in deeds. To carry out his thought, we must come to the conclusion that the best memorial to a deceased brother is service to mankind by those remaining. The most fitting way to honor our dead is to carry on the principles which they sought to uphold in life.

The first of these principles to be inscribed on our scroll of memory is "Charity" which is always placed at the top in our ritual. Charity is the highest virtue in the creed of every Elk, and it is the cornerstone of every lodge. We believe in the immortal principle that by giving, we receive; and that by sharing, we increase and do not divide our own estate.

Charity, however, is a great deal more to us than the mere giving of alms, or the sharing of worldly goods. We teach and believe in the "higher, and nobler, charity of thought, word, and deed." This is the kind of charity which softens the hearts of men with tolerance and understanding. It is the charity of good will toward men. It is the Christian charity of forgiveness and
pity, of courtesy and compassion.

The next principle on our scroll of memory for our departed brothers is "Justice." Here is a principle which we hold higher than the physical statutes of law which demand our obedience. Strict observance of the laws of the community, state and nation is part of the creed of every Elk, but the justice we try to put into practice is not mere rule-of-thumb justice. It is the kind that is enlightened with sympathy and tempered with mercy. As Addison said, to be perfectly just is an attribute of the Divine nature. But man can be just to the utmost of his abilities, and that is one of the glories of mankind.

On this memorial occasion, our thoughts on the subject of justice are illumined by the words of the Book of Proverbs:

"The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," and "The memory of the just is blessed." Those who have lived kind and compassionate lives are long remembered.

The third inscription on our memory scroll should be the tender words, "Brotherly Love." These are the words that lend form and substance to our Order, binding us together in a unity of mutual respect and consideration for the rights and privileges of others. These are the words that signify fraternalism, the
great principle which has bound men together in amity and good will throughout the centuries. It is one of the most powerful of all virtues, for it strengthens a man by assuring him that he need not "wander through the world forsaken," but that he may "hold communion with true and upright men" in mutual respect and regard.

It is in the spirit of brotherly love that we have come together today. The principle which bound us to our brothers in life is just as strong even though they are gone. The "mystic bond of brotherhood" which "makes all men one" in the principles of our Order, has made dear the memory of those we honor on this occasion.

Finally, we shall inscribe upon the scroll of our remembrance of those who shall come no more, the sturdy word, "Fidelity." Here is a virtue which must have equal rank with all the others, for it sums up all that we hold most dear. The virtue of fidelity strengthens our resolve and moulds our purpose, enabling us to act toward one another with charity, justice, and brotherly love. Without fidelity to principle in daily life, the great words we speak today would have little meaning.

In the last great motto of our Order, we enshrine our faith in the all-seeing and benign Ruler of the universe, into
whose trust we have given up our departed brothers for eternal keeping. Although we do not permit religious prejudice to enter into our spirits, we nevertheless unite in our faith in God. The great motto of fidelity also carries with it our faith in flag and country, our faith in our fellow men, and our faith in ourselves.

To these great faiths, we now add the testimony of our fidelity to the memory of those who have passed away. They have delivered unto us a trust of fidelity to the principles and ideals they cherished while in life, and we shall honor their memory only so long as we are faithful to those ideals.

Our memorial service today, therefore, should take the form of a rededication to the principles of charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity. These ideals, accepted as a philosophy of life, will serve to protect and perpetuate the essential dignity and character of mankind. They will guide a man throughout the days of his life, shielding him from improper steps, and assisting him in his relationships with his fellow man.

It is our further purpose to share those principles with others as often as we can, knowing that great principles could be wrought if all men were willing to follow the simple doctrine which they offer. A world which is now living in the dark shadows of the
threat of war would do well to accept those principles as a
guarantee of peace. Unless these principles form the basis of
agreements among men, we can never hope for a peaceful world. No
matter what nations may do, the earth will never enjoy a permanent
peace until such principles are followed by men everywhere.

Sometimes we are inclined to forget that the peaceful
way of life must start in the hearts of individual men before
it can become the basis of the foreign policy of nations. Govern-
ments do not necessarily reflect the hopes and desires of their
citizens, but they should always do so if the democratic ideal
is to be achieved. In the two World Wars through which mankind
has struggled within our lifetimes, the governments that caused
the trouble got too far away from the desires of their people.
Had these governments been true reflections of the beliefs of their
individual citizens, perhaps the two World Wars would never have
been fought. There is always danger that principles will be
violated when governments are too far removed from the aspirations
and ambitions of the people.

It is our hope and our faith that some day the principles
we uphold will become paramount in the hearts of men, so that
the warlike instinct will be a thing of the past. The day when
principle triumphs over greed and selfishness will be a great day in the
history of man. We can all hasten that day by keeping the principles of charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity uppermost in our own lives.

In so doing, we shall obey the injunction of the closing lines of Thanatopsis:

"So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

It is our faith that our absent brothers have departed this life "sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust," and that they did not go like the driven slave, but like respected men, secure in the knowledge that their going would be well marked and sorely grieved.

In the words of our ritual, "The faults of our brothers we write upon the sand; their virtues upon the tablets of love and memory."
May those virtues toward which they strived in their
days on earth flourish in our own hearts. May they light our way
henceforth through this confused world in which we live, until at
last we shall meet all our brothers in the eternal peace of God.