

Re-cover!

Texts: Revelation 22:7-10; Revelation 19:7-10; Acts 14:8-18

My wife and I shall never forget our weekend in the spring of 2011 at West Point. We were blessed to have been at graduation of a young man reared up in our church, Walter Reniery Arevelo, Jr. It was an honor when “Nedditto” asked me to pray the prayer of dedication in the famous chapel at West Point. The rich history and protocol of every event was quite remarkable and unforgettable.

At Valley Forge, General George Washington was becoming very discouraged because the men were not holding rank and the troops were lacking *esprit de corps*. History says, “No battle was fought at Valley Forge. Yet, it was the turning point of the Revolutionary War. It was here that the Continental army was desperately against the ropes—bloody, beaten, battle-weary, and ready to quit. Even General Washington conceded, ‘If the army does not get help soon, in all likelihood it will disband.’ The question must be asked, why didn't they disband?”

It was winter, 1778 that a Prussian officer named Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben volunteered to train the Continentals to drill. They marched, they presented arms, and they charged imaginary lines of Red Coats until they became a neatly organized band of brothers.

On that weekend in 2011 we observed the Corps of Cadets as they marched on The Plain at West Point that has been used since 1802 to drill some of the same drills taught by Baron von Steuben at the bequest of General Washington. There was one moment during the parade on The Plain that is inescapable. My mind keeps going back to this crystalline action carried out by The Long Gray Line with awe. The moment of which I speak was when the entire under-graduate corps of cadets marched to the end of The Plain and paid homage to the class of 2010. When the “Cows, Yuks and Plebes” passed the senior class, aka, “Firsties,” the command was given to each regiment, “Un-cover!” Immediately and in unison the hats came off and the senior cadets stood at attention. After the underclassmen passed, the master of ceremonies gave the explanation of the importance of the standard. The color, with our National flag, i.e., The Stars and Stripes, was the focal point of respect. Just before our flag passed by the senior Corps of Cadets, we were reminded to remove our hats with hands over our hearts unless we were members of the military or veterans in which case the salute was proper. But as the standard came by, the order was given to the cadets, “Re-cover!” Upon command each regiment snapped to attention, recovered their heads with their hats and saluted with the greatest of respect. The moment was full of emotion as the National Flag moved with poetry to the wind as she passed The Long Gray Line. I want you to visualize the respect, the honor and the discipline represented as the order to recover was given. On this Memorial Day weekend it would do us well to:

I. RECOVER OUR PATRIOTISM

Sometimes the younger generations forget that freedom is not free. In the American wars, all gave some and some gave all. When the shot was fired and heard around the world at Concord's Bridge near Lexington's Green, patriots arose to the occasion. When John Paul Jones was asked by the captain of the mighty Serapis if he and his men from the Bon Homme Richard desired to quarter (surrender), he cried back, "I've not yet begun to fight."

During the War of 1812 a young American lawyer was sent to the mightiest display of British Navy ever gathered in flotilla to negotiate a prisoner release. It soon became apparent that the American lawyer's role was now neutralized because of a decision the British command had made: either the flag at Fort McHenry would come down or the entire British fleet would loose its cannon full force on that fort. The men whom the young lawyer had come to rescue by parley had family members in that fort. The lawyer went below the deck of the ship and told the men bound in chains in the British war vessel the news. The lawyer stood near the opening above the deck. From the outset when the first vicious volley took place and the smoke cleared, they asked the lawyer, "Is our flag still there?" Not only was it still there, it stayed there through the night until the dawn's early light. Repeatedly, the soldiers asked if the flag was still there and when told it was, every time the boys cheered! It was struck more than once, but brave patriots raced to the flag to keep it up. When the battle had ended, the young lawyer Francis Scott Key walked into Fort McHenry and saw the bodies of brave men piled approximately five feet around the base of that pole. I have seen that tattered, battered flag hanging now in a museum. And I think about the lives that were given to keep our flag flying. Inspired by that night, Key wrote, "O! say can you see by the dawn's early light, What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming, Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight, O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming? And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there; O! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

May God help us to recover our legacy: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12). And we would do well to:

II. RECOVER OUR FAITH

Because many of us in the United States have nothing to compare our freedom to, we have no frame of reference from which to cherish our liberty. The most often heard comment from people who travel abroad is, "I did not realize how great America is until I went to another country."

Sadly, many a youthful American has forgotten how our faith played a vital role in establishing and defending our freedoms. In 1620 William Bradford wrote in the Mayflower Compact, "Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith..." affirming the reason for the Pilgrim journey. John Adams and John Hancock both confirmed in April 18, 1775, "We recognize no Sovereign but God, and no King but Jesus!" As early as 1765 Patrick Henry said in the House of Burgesses, "It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too

often that this nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason, peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here.” John Quincy Adams, in 1837 at the age of 69 when he delivered a Fourth of July speech at Newburyport, Massachusetts said, “Why is it that, next to the birthday of the Savior of the world, your most joyous and most venerated festival returns on this day [the Fourth of July]? Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the Gospel dispensation?

“Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity?”

As we hear dissenters from the faith decry the interlocking of the faith and the establishment of our country, we remind this disingenuous group of infidels the truth of the Scripture that says, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). Finally, may the Lord help us to:

III. RECOVER OUR LOYALTY

As I saw those cadets recover and salute, I was deeply impressed that it is time for America to recover and be loyal to (a) our Lord. Let us “..worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24); (b) our family. Spouses, keep your vows to one another and parents. Let us claim Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it;” (c) His Church. God has designed the assembly of His Church to be a great manifestation of His presence in this world. “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21). We are sinning by not giving our homage to the institution He established. Let's be faithful in attendance, our talents, and our giving. One of the names of the Lord is Jehovah Nissi, which means “The Lord our Banner.” He is our standard, He is our flag. It's time to recover! Let us stand at attention and take our orders.

-Pastor Pope-