Veterans Day Wreath-Laying Ceremony Address

Masonic Memorial at the Veterans Cemetery

Veterans, families, fellow Masons, and honored guests,

Today we gather to honor the men and women who have defended our nation's freedom. While society often looks to athletes or celebrities for heroes, true heroism is often found much closer to home, in our neighbors, friends, family members, and fellow citizens who answered the call to serve in our country's armed forces.

One such hero was Navy Captain **Royce Williams**, whose extraordinary courage during the Korean War remained largely unknown for decades. Facing overwhelming odds in aerial combat against superior enemy aircraft, he displayed remarkable skill, determination, and devotion to duty. His story reminds us that heroism is not measured by recognition, but by doing what is right when duty calls.

Another American hero, **Audie Murphy**, became the most decorated combat soldier of World War II. Yet his legacy extended far beyond the battlefield. While carrying the visible and invisible scars of war, he became an advocate for fellow veterans, demonstrating that service often continues long after the uniform is set aside.

That same spirit was embodied by **Diane Carlson Evans**, an Army nurse in Vietnam who later devoted herself to ensuring that the sacrifices of military women would never be forgotten. Through her determination, the Vietnam Women's Memorial became a lasting tribute to those who served with courage and compassion.

These individuals represent millions of veterans whose names may never appear in history books, but whose service has safeguarded our freedoms. Since the founding of our nation, generations of Americans have sworn an oath to defend this country, accepting hardship, sacrifice, and even the possibility of death on behalf of all of us.

Originally known as Armistice Day, November 11 marks the end of World War I. Yet history has taught us that freedom is never guaranteed and peace is never permanent. Every generation relies upon men and women willing to stand watch and answer the nation's call.

Memorial Day honors those who did not return home. Veterans Day honors those who did.

As we lay these wreaths today, let us remember that the freedoms we enjoy were secured by ordinary Americans who accomplished extraordinary things through their courage, character, and commitment to something greater than themselves.

As Masons, we are taught the enduring principles of **Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth**. The veterans we honor today embodied those virtues through their selfless service to our nation and their fellow citizens. Their example reminds us that true greatness is found not in personal gain, but in service to others.

Let us also remember those families who stood beside them, shared their sacrifices, and supported them through times of war and peace. They, too, are part of this legacy of service.

Audie Murphy once said, *"The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him."* That spirit has guided generations of American veterans and continues to guide those serving today.

As we conclude this ceremony, may we renew our commitment to honor their sacrifices, support our veterans, and preserve the freedoms for which they served. And may the **Great Architect of the Universe** watch over our veterans, comfort the families of the fallen, and guide our nation in the paths of peace, justice, and understanding.

Thank you, God Bless America, God Bless our Veterans, and may the Great Architect of the Universe bless and protect us all. Amen.