Memorial Day 2016

Monday, May 30, is a day for solemn reflection by all Americans. It is Memorial Day, formerly known as Decoration Day, instituted to honor the Civil War dead. After World War I, citizens expanded the observance to commemorate those who died in all American wars. In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday and changed the annual date from May 30 to the last Monday in May.

As individual Americans, and as a nation, we owe life as we know it today to the men and women who paid the ultimate price, their lives, for our freedoms; neither can we thank enough the families who sacrificed their loved ones for the preservation of the principles upon which the United States was founded.

One of the finest tributes to our departed veterans was written by Alfred Joyce Kilmer, who himself died a hero in fierce fighting near Seringes, France, on July 30, 1918, during World War I. He was an American journalist, poet, literary critic, lecturer and editor. He was a sergeant in the 165th U.S. Infantry Regiment when he was killed in the Second Battle of the Marne at the age of 31. Here is what he wrote about Memorial Day:

The bugle echoes shrill and sweet,
But not of war it sings today.
The road is rhythmic with the feet
Of men-at-arms who come to pray.

The roses blossom white and red
On tombs where weary soldiers lie;
Flags wave above the honored dead
And martial music cleaves the sky.

Above their wreath-strewn graves we kneel,
They kept the faith and fought the fight.
Through flying lead and crimson steel
They plunged for Freedom and the Right.

May we, their grateful children, learn
Their strength, who lie beneath this sod,
Who went through fire and death to earn
At last the accolade of God.

In shining rank on rank arrayed
They march, the legions of the Lord;
He is their Captain unafraid,
The Prince of Peace ... Who brought a sword.

May God bless America, the land purchased by the blood of patriots true.

–Beecher Hunter