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St. Martin's Church Service 4/7/91 [OA 6031]

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ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH SERVICE  
SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 1991 / 9:00 A.M.

DR. PAYNE, FRIENDS, GOOD MORNING. ALMOST AS SOON AS THE PEACE WAS SHATTERED IN THE GULF LAST AUGUST, PRAYERS FOR PEACE BEGAN AT ST. MARTIN'S. FIRST WERE SPECIAL PRAYERS ON SUNDAYS AND IN THE MID-WEEK SERVICES. BY JANUARY THERE WERE DAILY PRAYERS. THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILDREN SENT HANDMADE CHRISTMAS CARDS TO OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN THE GULF, AND THE CHURCH SENT ALONG PRAYER BOOKS AND CROSSES.

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AND HOUSTON, AS WE SAW ALL ACROSS AMERICA, WAS BEDECKED IN FLAGS AND YELLOW RIBBONS.

THIS SAYS MUCH ABOUT OUR CITY AND ABOUT OUR CHURCH. BUT IT SAYS MUCH MORE ABOUT OUR COUNTRY. FOR DURING THESE ANXIOUS MONTHS, THIS STORY HAS UNFOLDED A THOUSAND TIMES OVER. IN CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES, IN COMMUNITIES OF EVERY SIZE. IN SCHOOLS AND SCOUT TROOPS, AND COUNTLESS TIMES IN THE QUIET, SIMPLE ACTS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO CARE.

WE ARE, "ONE NATION UNDER GOD."

ON THESE SPECIAL DAYS OF THANKSGIVING, WE DO HAVE SO VERY MUCH FOR WHICH TO BE THANKFUL. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE LONG-AWAITED LIBERATION OF TINY KUWAIT, AND THE END OF THE TERROR RENDERED UPON THE KUWAITI PEOPLE. AND FOR OUR MEN AND WOMEN WHO PERFORMED THEIR MISSION WITH SUCH COURAGE AND CONVICTION, WE ARE GRATEFUL THAT THEIR LOSSES WERE MERCIFULLY FEW. AND WE ARE EXTRAORDINARILY PROUD OF OUR TROOPS NOW RETURNING HOME.

IT IS THE TIME TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD, NOT FOR WINNING THE WAR, BUT FOR HELPING US TO DO WHAT WAS RIGHT. WE MOURN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN, AND OUR HEARTS GO OUT TO THEIR FAMILIES. BUT WE SHOULD THANK GOD ALMIGHTY FOR MEN AND WOMEN WHO WILL RISK THEIR LIVES TO SAVE THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

"WHERE DID WE GET SUCH MEN?" JAMES MICHENER'S ADMIRAL TARRANT ASKED. THE ANSWER IS, RIGHT HERE AT HOME.

WELL, I BELIEVE TWO SUCH MEN RECENTLY RETURNED FROM THE GULF AND ARE WITH US TODAY, F-16 PILOT CAPTAIN JOHN HUNNELL, AND HIS WINGMAN, LIEUTENANT SCOTT LONG. I READ THE LETTER JOHN SENT TO FATHER JOE [REVEREND DI PAOLA] ABOUT HIS SECOND COMBAT MISSION OVER IRAQ. IT WAS AS TERRIFYING AS IT WAS MAJESTIC. HE DESCRIBES AN UNNERVING SILENCE AMIDST MISSILE TRAILS AND BRIGHT FLASHES OF FLAK -- THE ONLY SOUNDS THE DULL ROAR OF HIS ENGINE, THE RADIO, AND THE BEEPING OF HIS RADAR ALARM.

AND ALTHOUGH HE DIDN'T MENTION IT, PROBABLY THE BEATING OF HIS HEART FELT PRETTY LOUD AT THE TIME.

IT'S BEEN SAID, "THE WINGS OF PRAYER CARRY HIGH AND FAR". WELL, CAPTAIN HUNNELL MENTIONED A PRAYER HE REPEATED OFTEN. IT SAYS, "IF I FORGET THEE, DO NOT THOU FORGET ME." THE LORD DID NOT FORGET JOHN, NOR THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF HIS CAUSE.

AND SO LET ME CLOSE ON THIS NATIONAL DAY OF THANKSGIVING, WITH A BRIEF PRAYER:

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DEAR GOD, WE HUMBLY GIVE YOU OUR HEARTFELT THANKS. WE THANK YOU FOR BRINGING THE WAR TO A QUICK END. WE THANK YOU FOR SPARING THE LIVES OF SO MANY OF OUR MEN AND WOMEN WHO WENT TO THE GULF. WE ASK YOU TO BRING COMFORT TO THE FAMILIES OF THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY. WE ASK YOU TO PROTECT THE INNOCENTS WHO THIS DAY ARE SUFFERING IN IRAQ. WE GIVE THANKS FOR THE BRAVERY AND THE STEADFAST SUPPORT OF OUR COALITION PARTNERS.

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AND YES WE PRAY FOR OUR ENEMIES -- THAT THEY MAY BRING A JUST PEACE TO THEIR TROUBLED LAND. AMEN.

Demarest  
April 5, 1991  
Draft #2

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH SERVICE  
APRIL 7, 1991

Reverend Di Paola, friends, good morning. Almost as soon as the peace was shattered in the Gulf last August, prayers for peace began at St. Martin's. First were special prayers on Sundays and in the mid-week services. By January there were daily prayers. The Sunday school children sent handmade Christmas cards to our men and women in the Gulf, and the church sent along prayer books and crosses. Houston, as we saw all across America, was bedecked in flags and yellow ribbons.

This says much about our city and about our parish. But it says much more about our country. For this story has unfolded a thousand times over, during these anxious months. In churches and synagogues, in communities of every size. In schools and scout troops, and countless times in the quiet, simple acts of individuals who care.

On these special days of thanksgiving, we do have so very much for which to be thankful. Of course, we are grateful for the long-awaited liberation of tiny Kuwait, and the end of the terror rendered upon the Kuwaiti people. And for our men and women who performed their mission with such courage and conviction, we are grateful that their losses were mercifully

few. And we are extraordinarily proud of our troops now returning home.

It is the time to give thanks to God, not for winning the war, but for helping us to do what was right. Naturally, we mourn for those who have fallen, and our hearts go out to their families. But we should thank God Almighty for men and women who will give their lives to save the lives of others.

I believe with us today are Lee and John Hunnell, parents of Captain John Hunnell, an F-16 pilot of Desert Storm who is now safely back at his base in Florida. I read the letter John sent to Reverend Di Paola about his second combat mission over Iraq. It was as terrifying as it was majestic. He describes an unnerving silence amidst missile trails and bright flashes of flak -- the only sounds the dull roar of his engine, the radio, and the beeping of his radar alarm. And although he didn't mention it, probably the beating of his heart felt pretty loud at the time.

Captain Hunnell mentioned a prayer he repeated often, "If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me." The Lord did not forget John, nor the righteousness of his cause. It's been said, "The wings of prayer carry high and far." Those prayers, and John's faith in himself, in his country, and in God, can tell us all something wonderful about our capacity to do good -- that we are indeed part of something larger than ourselves.

And so let me close on this, our third national day of Thanksgiving, with a brief prayer: Lord, let us be humble in our achievements, and trusting in Your greatness. Help us to comprehend our confidence and use its inspiration for the sake of others. Bless those who have stood with us, and bless those who still must endure great suffering. Let all your children, wherever they may be, know Your infinite mercy. Help us keep faith with our convictions, for through them You have provided to us the Way to goodness. Amen.