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National Day of Prayer, 1986

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Prayer is deeply woven into the fabric of our history from its very beginnings. The same Continental Congress that declared our independence also proclaimed a National Day of Prayer. And from that time forward, it would be hard to exaggerate the role that prayer has played in the lives of individual Americans and in the life of the Nation as a whole.

Our greatest leaders have always turned to prayer at times of crisis. We recall the moving story of George Washington kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge to ask for divine assistance when the fate of our fledgling Nation hung in the balance. And Abraham Lincoln tells us that on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg, "I went into my room and got down on my knees in prayer." Never before, he added, had he prayed "with as much earnestness."

More than once, Lincoln also summoned the entire Nation to its knees before the God in Whose hand lies the destiny of nations. It was, he said, "fit and becoming in all peoples, at all times, to acknowledge and revere the Supreme Government of God . . . and to pray with all fervency and contrition . . ."

After the shock of Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt told us he took courage from the thought that "the vast majority of the members of the human race" joined us in a common prayer for victory as we fought for "freedom under God."

Prayer, of course, is deeply personal: the way in which it finds expression depends on our individual dispositions as well as on our religious convictions. Just as our religious institutions are guaranteed freedom in this land, so also do we cherish the diversity of our faiths and the freedom afforded to each of us to pray according to the promptings of our individual conscience.

Yet the light of prayer has a common core: it is our hopes and aspirations; our sorrows and fears; our deep remorse and renewed resolve; our thanks and joyful praise; and most especially our love—all turned toward God. The Talmud aptly calls prayer the "service of the heart," and Christ enjoins us to "pray without ceasing."

Accordingly, like the Presidents who have come before me, I invite my fellow citizens to join me in earnest prayer that the God Who has led and protected us through so many trials and favored us with such abundant blessings may continue to watch over our land. Let us never forget the wise counsel of Theodore Roosevelt that "all our extraordinary material development . . . will go for nothing unless with that growth goes hand in hand the moral, the spiritual growth that will enable us to use aright the other as an instrument."

In prayer, let us ask that God's light may illuminate the minds and hearts of our people and our leaders, so that we may meet the challenges that lie before us with courage and wisdom and justice. In prayer let us recall with confidence the promise of old that if we humble ourselves before God and pray and seek His face, He will surely hear and forgive and heal and bless our land.

By joint resolution of the Congress approved April 17, 1952, the recognition of a particular day set aside each year as a National Day of Prayer has become a cherished national tradition. Since that time, every President has proclaimed an annual National Day of Prayer, resuming the tradition begun by the Continental Congress.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Thursday, May 1, 1986, as National Day of Prayer. I call upon all Americans to join me in prayer that day. I ask them to gather in their homes and places of worship with their ministers and teachers of religion and heads of families, to give thanks for every good thing God has done for us and to seek His guidance and strength in the conduct of our lives.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and tenth.

Ronald Reagan