



National Day of Prayer, 1989

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Throughout our Nation's history, Americans have been a prayerful people, giving thanks to our Creator for the blessings of liberty and seeking His help and guidance in preserving them.

Those who braved the long ocean journey from Europe to first settle in the American colonies were men and women of varied, but equally devout, religious beliefs. Many had been persecuted for those beliefs at home, and they sought a new land where they might be able to worship freely. Years later, our forefathers would clearly remember this and begin our Bill of Rights with the guarantee that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

But it was not just the experience of their ancestors that led the Founding Fathers to shape a free and democratic government for our Nation. On the contrary, their view of the rights of man and the proper role of government were derived from their firm faith in God. They believed that all men are created equal, "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Any system of government they established must guarantee individual liberty and equality before the law, for freedom is the God-given right of all men. Calling for daily prayer at the Constitutional Convention, a number of delegates expressed their conviction that only with divine guidance would the new democracy be true and successful. "If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice," observed Benjamin Franklin, "is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?" Dr. Franklin knew that human wisdom alone could neither build nor keep a free and just government.

As our first President, George Washington would continue to pray for guidance from "that powerful Friend" invoked by Ben Franklin. "I shall take my present leave," said the new President, "but not without resorting once more to that benign Parent of the Human Race in humble supplication that . . . His blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations and the wise measures on which the success of this government must depend." Immediately after his Inauguration, President Washington made his way with the Congress through the crowds of well-wishers from Federal Hall to Saint Paul's chapel. There a prayer service was offered by the Chaplain of Congress for our new Nation.

The great faith that led our Nation's Founding Fathers to pursue this bold experiment in self-government has sustained us in uncertain and perilous times; it has given us strength and inspiration to this very day. Like them, we do well to recall our "firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," to give thanks for the freedom and prosperity this Nation enjoys, and to pray for continued help and guidance from our wise and loving Creator. For what President Washington wrote 200 years ago remains true today: "the liberty enjoyed by the people of these States, of worshipping Almighty God agreeably to their consciences, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights."

Since the approval of the joint resolution of the Congress on April 17, 1952, calling for the designation of a specific day to be set aside each year as a National Day of Prayer, recognition of such a day has become a cherished annual event. Each President since then has proclaimed a National Day of Prayer annually under the authority of that resolution, continuing a tradition that actually dates back to the Continental Congress, which issued the first official proclamation for a National Day of Prayer on July 12, 1775. By Public Law 100-307, the first Thursday in May of each year has been set aside as a National Day of Prayer.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 4, 1989, as a National Day of Prayer. I invite the people of this great Nation to gather together on that day in homes and places of worship to pray, each after his or her own manner, for unity in the hearts of all mankind.

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

George Bush