

There is an old warhorse I met that God saw fit to call forth from the fight to fight the good fight of faith as an Army chaplain. During his career he was famous for asking other chaplains one simple question, "Chaplain, what is your purpose?" As you can imagine responses were many and expected from provide religious support, advance God's Kingdom, help those in need. But the response he led them to was simply this, "Chaplain your purpose is to prepare Soldiers to die." This was the Army he grew up in as an Infantryman, this was indeed the Army Chaplains Fox, Poling, Goode, Washington answered the call to serve. What was true of our past is still true of the present. To fully serve our Nation one must first die to self and ultimately be prepared to give their life, their last full measure. That response to a simple question has resonated with me but as we stand in this sacred moment together I realize it is incomplete for the response must be twofold; in order for a chaplain to prepare Soldiers to die they must first themselves be prepared to die.

That fateful night in 1943 there in the North Atlantic I struggle to fathom the choice each of these men were faced with. There is part of you that naturally thinks of the future, of family, of tomorrows, of great ministry moments yet to experience. But their choice instead reveals each of these men had long ago died to themselves, each chose to sacrifice that others may live, and each stood courageously with others in this valley of the shadow of death moment. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than he lay down his life for his friends." His words are still puzzling to many but in essence he is saying that when we witness such acts in this earthly life, we glimpse the eternal, we glimpse an expression of the love God has for us, a love that is made known in sacrifice. Each of these men in their own way knew this love, each of these men within each of their faith traditions understood such divine sacrifice.

Here at USACHCS it is fitting and proper the first image that is encountered by volunteers desiring to answer the call as a chaplain, who long to serve both God and Country is a stained glass mural that bears the image of these four chaplains. It is there as if to say to fully answer this call you must know whose footsteps you walk in, whose

shoulders you stand upon, to march upon this road you too must die to self and stand ready likewise to give your last full measure if called upon. Simply stated, to answer the call to the chaplaincy is to lay down one's life. This today is not chaplain lore, this is our Chaplain legacy. The cynic, the critic would say, "what a waste of good godly men? What good deeds of ministry they could have done?" I instead praise God for these men and their sacrifice, for it has spoken and continues to speak from eternity to the earthly. Over the many decades since that night their example has shaped, forged, and witnessed to thousands of chaplains in their faithful service to God and country. Their courageous and sacrificial act has been formative and foundational for each of us who now walk after them.

A mere 12 weeks pass, a time of equipping and preparation at this institution comes to an end, newly minted chaplains depart out into our great Army, passing by that same mural now with the images of the four chaplains to their back, with the legacy of these men looking over them as to say "now go forth and live out this calling, live it out in light of our example". When one embraces the sacred and noble call to serve as a chaplain, the Almighty asks of us what was asked of them, "will you lay down your life for my sake". In a moment these men each responded in love and action. Oswald Chambers speaks that such moments may never come to us all and the great challenge is not just laying down your life in a moment but the grave challenge is also of laying "down your life day in and day out with the sense of high calling of God".

The question I present to us this day, is how may we as a Chaplain Corps, how may we individual chaplains, how may we as Religious Affairs Specialists honor these men and their sacrifice? What chapters will each of us compose and add to this rich legacy? Will words such as valor, love, honor, and sacrifice be proclaimed from our hearts and our lives? The charge, the challenge to us this day as the Apostle Paul says, may we be "living sacrifices", men and women who stand ready to lay down our lives daily, and if called upon to such a moment as Chaplains Fox, Poling, Goode, Washington were; may we love as these

immortal chaplains loved, willing to courageously lay down our life as a sacrifice for both our God and our Country.