



**Reflections at President Kennedy's Grave**  
**after laying the wreath**  
**Arlington National Cemetery**

March 19, 2011

We are Hibernians gathered here today to continue our decades long tradition of paying our respects to a brother member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians who in his days served in the highest office of this nation. While his time as president was only about a thousand days, President Kennedy left a profound impact on American society and on the world.

Around his gravesite are inscribed some of his most memorable words that still echo true today and will continue down the decades of history. With these words, uttered five decades ago, he put before us his ideals and his goals not only for the America of 1961 but for the America of today, and for America in the generations yet unborn.

On his inauguration day he challenged his generation and future generations when he declared -- "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." This is perhaps President Kennedy's most remembered statement.

Kennedy inspired our youth to consider public service as a noble calling – as an opportunity to give back to society and to help make a difference not only in the cities and towns of our country but also in communities around the world. The Peace Corps is today President Kennedy's legacy and through it our young men and women as well as other generations are dedicating their lives to serving others.

President Kennedy reminded our nation and the world that Americans are "heirs of that first revolution" and that they would "pay any price" for liberty. These words hold a clear message in this year of revolutions and overthrowing of dictators.

He challenged the nation and the world to work together to control the use of arms, explore the wonders of science and create a country "where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved."

In his many speeches, President Kennedy did not hesitate to quote Scripture and invoke God's name. This is how he concluded his inaugural address by asking for God's blessing and help in these endeavors and noted that "here on earth, God's work must truly be our own." With this statement, President Kennedy could not have been more emphatic about the need for religious convictions in the workings of government.

Today, Kennedy's words are inspiring not just Americans but people around the world who come here to pay their respects at his grave.

It was President Kennedy who rose above legalisms during the Civil Rights struggle. He spoke of the moral injustice of racial discrimination. In his inaugural speech he clearly reminded all of us that "the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God." Perhaps today there are groups who would challenge the validity of that declaration.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, he dedicated his efforts to reduce nuclear weapons so that our future generations can live in a peaceful world.

The light of this eternal flame before us here is a reminder of the words from his inaugural address when he proclaimed that the “energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.”

May this flame give all people who come here the hope and inspiration for a better world in which they can serve their families, communities and homelands in peace with justice while “asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.”

John E. McInerney  
President  
John F. Kennedy Division