

JFK Tribute by future Columbia MS mayor E. D. "Buddy" McLean

JOHN F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL SERVICE
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For the past two and a half days, we have watched and listened to a series of events that are almost impossible to comprehend. Today has been proclaimed as a day of national mourning by the President and this hour as an hour of prayer and meditation in our community for the tragedy that has befallen our nation. This must be a moment of personal rededication for each of us, for in some way, we each must share the guilt for this tragic deed.

Certainly, I shall not attempt to eulogize our late president for this has been done by men far more gifted than I, and most of us have had the privilege of sharing these great remarks. For a moment this morning, I would like to share with you some of the thoughts that come to my mind during these dreadful hours, in the hope that in some way we might leave here more dedicated to share our responsibilities as citizens of this great nation.

The first real shock and feeling of guilt in this horrible event was when my ten-year-old daughter came home and told me of students in her class rooms who cheered when they were told of the death of President Kennedy. My first thought, possibly to ease my conscience, was, 'Well, they are just too young to know better.' But wasn't this really a reflection of my image. Am I not guilty? Haven't I said in jest that we would be better off if Mr. Kennedy was dead? Haven't I just supported a political campaign whose paramount theme was to do away with the Kennedys?

My image, a mirror reflecting my beliefs, my degrading the highest office in the land. Must I not share the guilt for the attitude of the youth of my community. Many may see this as most insignificant, but to me it crystallized my failure. The cheering of the death of a leader of the greatest land on earth. Is this my image? If I allow this to continue where shall it end. Shall I not reap what I sow?

As I watched this tragedy unfold before me, I have thought of the hate and vengeance portrayed by such an act, and I thought of this same hate that projects its ugly face throughout our beloved Southland today.

One of the most common remarks of these last few days has been, "Thank God it didn't happen in Mississippi." Should we not be asking ourselves, "Could it have happened in Mississippi?" Isn't this our real concern as responsible citizens. Just how far as Citizens, and above all as Christians, have we degraded ourselves? Can we as true Christians hate with a vengeance? Can Christ and hate share our hearts at the same moment? As we read a moment ago in our scripture, Christ, our Christ, felt nothing but compassion for those who crucified him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Can we as followers of this Christ leave here today with hate in our hearts? Where are we headed? What is our image?

I thank God that he has given to me the feeling of compassion for those about me. That I can actually shed tears for both sorrow and beauty. To me, the individual who cannot feel compassion is indeed unfortunate. One of the most beautiful remarks of yesterday was that the quietness of the rotunda was so still it almost cried. Though we in the South differed greatly in

our beliefs from those of our late president, IF we could not in the last few days feel compassion for his loved ones, we had best examine closely our own hearts.

One of our early leaders said, "I may differ with you violently, but I will fight with my life for your RIGHT to express your opinion." This was the foundation of this great nation, a right granted to each of us under our constitution. Yet, today to differ breeds hatred. If I don't think like you, I am a traitor. To disagree is to be disagreeable. We find ourselves afraid to express our opinions for fear we will be "Labeled". Most of our progress has been accomplished by those who dared to differ but in this great country where they have enjoyed the right to do so, they were free to accomplish their wildest dreams. Today we see this freedom being cut down on all sides; for to differ is to be wrong. May we again learn to respect the opinions of others.

As I watched the events of these tragic days being brought to me only moments after they had happened, and some unfold before my very eyes, I could not help marvel at the wonders of our day. Yet as I thought of these wonders in the area of communications all this progress, I was struck by the thought of how utterly man has failed in learning to live together. We have had the blue prints to accomplish the latter since the first year of our Lord -- Our Holy Bible -- but we have never learned to follow them. How Tragic.

I have shared with you these few moments three thoughts that have concerned me in these hours -- our image before our children, the hatred we find about us, and our readiness to condemn those who dare to differ. These are but three that have flashed through my mind and I am sure there were others perhaps more important that came to you. I have purposely not elaborated on these, nor have I attempted to give answers for my sole purpose this morning is to make YOU think, if not about my thoughts, about your own concerning this tragic event. To brand in your mind, the utter futility of this act. To make you ask, "Don't we all share some of the guilt?" I am convinced that if we are to continue as a great nation and a free people, we and others like ourselves who are gathered throughout our land today, MUST GO FORTH from here promising ourselves that we shall overcome our complacency, we shall examine our beliefs, we shall face our image, and the guilt of last Friday can never again be placed on our shoulders. In essence, we shall be Christians, we shall follow the blue print here before us.

Now for a few moments in our own way, may we through silent prayer seek His Divine Guidance.

