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Greetings, Sir Knights! February is a month that brings us several opportunities to celebrate and reflect. It is a month that portends the end of Winter and the start of Spring, and fresh beginnings, albeit with the aid of a large rodent's eyesight. We express our feelings to those we love on Saint Valentine's Day with notes, flowers, and candy. We celebrate the history and achievements of our brothers and sisters of African heritage.

We also honor the great leaders of our country from the past 244 years of its official existence on President's Day, which falls upon the third Monday in February, although it all started with Brother George Washington's birthday, which became an official holiday in 1885. Those of us who have a few years behind us remember when, specifically, George Washington's and Abraham Lincoln's birthdays were national holidays, until 1971, when the Uniform Monday Holiday Act took effect through an executive order from President Richard Nixon.

This Act effectively shifted Washington's birthday from February 22nd and combined it with Abraham Lincoln's birthday into what is now known as President's Day. So much for this brief history of February holidays, and appropriately, after a new American President has just been inaugurated January 20th, we move on to perhaps America's greatest known mason, Brother George Washington.

Brother Washington was raised as a Master Mason in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1752. A review of his subsequent history shows that he took the lessons of masonic philosophy very seriously and did his best to inculcate their value to his friends, colleagues, and charges. It is well known that, during the Revolutionary War, the majority of the commanders of the Continental Army were members of our fraternity and belonged to Army lodges.

Following the war, Brother George was sworn in as the first President of the United States, by Brother Robert Livingston, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New York. The bible upon which he took the oath of office was from his own masonic lodge, St. John's #1, from where it was retrieved when they found that no bible was already provided for the ceremony. This bible is often on tour, even today.

In researching the speeches and writings of our first President, the sheer wisdom shines through, usually through great humbleness. He seems to have always presented his words in a way that promoted Brotherly Love, faith, and goodwill, while at the same time providing sage wisdom to those who sought out his council. We can feel the masonic influences if we listen to his words.

"Our own Country's Honor, all call upon us for a vigorous and manly exertion, and if we now shamefully fail, we shall become infamous to the whole world. Let us therefore rely upon the goodness of the Cause, and the aid of the supreme Being, in whose hands Victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble Actions -- The Eyes of all our Countrymen are now upon us, and we shall have their blessings, and praises, if happily we are the instruments of saving them from the Tyranny mediated against them. Let us therefore animate and encourage each other, and show the whole world, that a free man contending for Liberty on his own ground is superior to any slavish mercenary on earth."
~ George Washington, 1776

At this time in our country's history, Brother George leads us to the conclusion that the underlying philosophies of Freemasonry were the foundation of social, political, religious, and educational reform, concepts which were opposed by the monarchies of Europe, and religious authorities as well. Washington's leadership and involvement with the craft gave him the confidence that America's military secrets were safe.

In his letters and addresses to Masonic bodies, Washington repeated his profound esteem for their principles. In 1797, he addressed the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts: "My attachment to the Society of which we are all members will dispose me always to contribute my best endeavors to promote the honor and prosperity of the Craft". Later in the same speech he said that the Masonic institution was one whose liberal principles are founded on the immutable laws of truth and justice, and whose grand object was to promote the happiness of the human race.

His faith, his loyalty to not only the Craft, but also to the fledgling country to which we consider him our first father, his compassion for his fellow man, and even for his enemies, embodies not only the teachings of our sacred fraternity, but also the teachings of our blessed Savior, Jesus Christ. If he were alive today, it is hard to say what he might think of how we have evolved as a fraternity, and as a nation. Perhaps he would take it all in, and merely leave us with one last pearl of wisdom, borrowed from Bill and Ted, "Be excellent to each other," and leave it at that. God bless you all.

*In His Service,***Gary H. Freedman, Grand Commander**