



Fraternal Order of Police **FLORIDA STATE LODGE**



**President James Preston's address at the 27th Annual
Florida Law Enforcement Memorial Service
Tallahassee Capitol
May 4, 2009**

“We can do no greater honor than that of keeping them alive in our hearts and memories”

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I am James Preston, President of the Florida Fraternal Order of Police. I extend a warm welcome to each of you who have gathered here this beautiful morning for the 27th Annual Law Enforcement Memorial Service. Thank you for joining with me here at the Florida Law Enforcement Memorial Monument on the grounds of the Florida Capitol as we gather to honor the lives and memories of our fallen heroes. I am especially honored to share this day with the families and friends of those officers whose name now appears on the Memorial wall. You are our honored guests and we gather to wrap our arms around you to help carry the great burden of loss that has been placed upon you. As you look upon the many officers gathered here today, recognize that this is a part your law enforcement family. When one of ours falls we all experience grief in some way.

Today we are reminded of their sacrifice. Yet we are not here to mourn. We may never fully understand, as the survivors do, nor, with all of our compassion can we feel what the survivors feel to this day, and what they will continue to feel as long as they live. What we felt and are expressing with words can not come close to the anguish the survivors endure.

We gather together to praise and honor them and remember them, not at their final moment as life drains from their body, not at their weakest moment but standing tall and full of pride, for their strong character and proud service and lifetime of memories they gave us in their role of becoming our heroes.

These were men and women whose lives made ours better just for having known them. We've worked beside them, we knew their strength and weaknesses, what made them laugh, what made them sad, we loved them and miss them dearly. As long as that memory remains alive in our hearts, as long as we keep the promise to “never forget”, they are with us.

These brave men and women are America's modern warriors, killed on the domestic battlefield in a never ending war on crime. They stood between law and order and total chaos, between peace and tranquility and anarchy. They provide the safety we enjoy as Americans in our pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

We can do no greater honor than that of keeping them alive in our hearts and memories.

The wives, husbands, parents, children, friends and co-workers still experience memories everywhere, pulling at us, touching us. Suddenly, a scent, a shirt, a favorite song will flood our memory and bring them back for a fleeting moment. They beckon us to remember that the life of a single individual can make such a difference.

Eight Florida officers gave their lives in the line of duty in 2008. We can and do pledge to preserve their honor and to never forget.

Just last Wednesday, I attended a parole hearing for the murderer of North Miami Police Officer Carl Wallace Mertes who was gunned down in 1980 by a thug in a stolen car. I never knew Officer Mertes but I've known a thousand officers just like him. We were at the hearing to express our resolve that when someone takes the life of a law enforcement officer in the line of duty, they forfeit their own and should never take another breath of freedom.

That same day, I traveled just to the west, to Crestview, Florida and attended the joint memorial service for Okaloosa County Deputy Sheriff's York and Lopez. Also gunned down in the line of duty. Our most recent victims of senseless violence.

It takes a special kind of person to choose law enforcement as a profession. Look to them and ask them what inspires you to take such a job. Most will stumble over the answer and say something about helping people. But, I believe that it is the overwhelming sense of duty. A genuine feeling of knowing that through their courage they can and do make a difference for the better. None ever dream that their name could be the next one added to the granite wall. But each will face danger squarely to protect their friends and strangers from harm.

Today, we pay tribute to these brave men and women who have given so much of themselves. Not because they died but because they lived.

Thank you for being here today and sharing this moment in time with the families. May God bless them and keep them all.