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Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument Memorial Day Service
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Like many of us here, Memorial Day is personal for me. My father, who will be 93 this year, served in the 10th Mountain Division in World War II, my husband with the Marines in Vietnam—and he, Cal Snyder, is here today. I know how deeply they were marked by it, and over the past 40 years I've watched lots of young people and neighbors from this community choose to serve their country and accept the risks that it requires.

We think of them on this day, as we stand before this glorious monument to the soldiers and sailors who preserved the Union, to the memory of all those we have given since, and to everyone who, today, amid these deeply selfish times, stands between us and harm.

Memorial Day is also personal because it calls on us—it obligates us—not to celebrate the deeds of war but to remind one another that the pain and solace of the human heart seem little changed despite the legions of names we have inscribed, by the lists of victories, or the sacrifices of the living whom we ask to bear forever their war memory and its wounds.

Memorial Day was originally intended to be a day for reflecting whether the scourge of war must live in the human heart as deeply as love or hope . . . whether we can ever let it rest, and why we cannot reach the peace to which this immense sacrifice was meant to bring us.

I want to close by thanking all those in uniform and our veterans for their service—the West Side community and all Manhattanites and New Yorkers who serve and have served. I also want to offer a special shout-out to George Chall, founder and spirit of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Association.

At the bright young age of 93, George is now supposedly retired. We miss him, for without him, and those he inspired to join him, there would be no ceremony today or any other year. Without him I would not have found the money to restore the South plaza, felt so deeply Memorial Day's sacred meanings, or understood why the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument must be preserved.

He taught us that this monument matters not just because there is a Landmarks Law, or because these stones shine so beautifully in the light. He taught us that even such a great temple of memory as this is nothing unless it lives in our hearts.

I am delighted that Peter Galasinao is now leading the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Association, and with the Members of his Board, he is doing a great job. I pledge to work with the Memorial Association and with the Parks Department to renovate—in the words of David Dunlop, the wonderful New York Times reporter, and a West-Sider, “one of the astonishing memorial chambers in New York: a 50-foot-high cylindrical rotunda of elaborately carved marble rising above five colossal, empty statuary niches. It culminates in a great dome, ornamented with green mosaic palm fronds and topped by an oculus through which one can see a cupola of polished marble that sparkles like a celestial, faceted jewel.” I will add that thanks to the nonprofit Open House New York, which every year sponsors tours into places that we don't normally get to see, I have been inside the Monument, and the walls were way too moist for the non-rainy October day. It needs a major restoration.

This is the lesson of Memorial Day with which I leave you: homage to those who serve, honor to those we gave, and above all never forgetting why we loved them, and why we must have places such as this to gather and remember them, always.