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When I was a boy growing up during the Korean War, I was reminded of the risks our men in uniform were enduring and of the need for us at home to make some sacrifice in support of their efforts in that far away country. I heard stories of the enforced sacrifice of World War II, of ration stamps for sugar, gas, and other commodities. I was taught that it was a civilian duty to make such sacrifices when the nation was at war so that our fighting forces would have first choice of materiel needed to be successful and victorious.

Sometime in the early 1960s, however, we started to hear about “guns and butter” – the idea that we could fight a war without giving up anything, any comfort or necessity, in our daily lives while our armed forces were fighting, bleeding, and dying in Vietnam. We even declared a “war on poverty” with a promise to increase the benefits of our civilian economy for all our citizens. Unfortunately, one result of this approach was to reduce or eliminate any sense of personal participation in the war effort by our people at home. We have continued this same course since then, and I believe it is time for the President to call for a new national sacrifice in support of our war efforts in southwest Asia.

That sacrifice, not of commodities and comfort, should be for the nation to heed the words of President Lincoln in his second inaugural address: *“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, **to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan**, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”*

It is not enough for the Departments of Defense and of Veterans Affairs to do all in their power to care for our combatants, our veterans, and their families. Their resources will never be adequate to do all that needs to be done for the men and women who put their lives on the line for all the rest of us. Faith communities, civic clubs, and employers all have a sacrificial role to play in caring for the social, spiritual, and economic welfare of our troops and their families. We need to welcome them, employ them, and assist them in their full integration into the communities in which they live and work.

Doctors, dentists, and professional counselors likewise have a responsibility to care for the physical and psychological wounds suffered on our behalf. We suggest that our parishioners encourage all healthcare professional with whom they have a relationship to enroll as Tricare providers and welcome service members and their families to their practices.

While many of us have started saying “Thank you” to people in uniform, we need to take that gratitude another step. Let us start asking, “What may I do for you?” By taking an active part in the lives of others, we can lessen the strain of family separation and frequent deployments; we can hold open or create new jobs for returning members of the National Guard and Reserves; we can act as problem solvers for families at home; and we can help to heal the wounds of war both seen and unseen.

When our armed forces are deployed to engage in combat, they are not the only ones at war—we as a nation are at war. Trying to have it both ways has not served us well. Perhaps by supporting and upholding our men and women in uniform and their families at home, we can recover our sense of unity as a people and our appreciation for the high cost of our freedom.