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Pool Report

3/27/05

President Bush and his family attended Easter services at Fort Hood, where he offered a holiday tribute to American military personnel.

"I want to wish all the fellow citizens and their families a happy Easter," Bush told reporters at the conclusion of the service. "We prayed for peace for our soldiers and their families. It's an honor to be here at Fort Hood to celebrate Easter with those who wear the nation's uniform. We wish you all a happy Easter, too."

He took no questions.

It was cold, gusty and overcast when the pool departed Waco for the 30-minute helicopter ride to Fort Hood, the nation's largest landlocked military base and home to the Army's 1st Cavalry Division and 4th Infantry Division. Midway there, the sun broke through the clouds.

The Bushes attended the 10 a.m. service at the 4th Infantry Division Memorial Chapel, a multi-denomination facility with stained glass windows and white cinderblock walls. About 200 congregants attended the service, a few dressed in Army uniforms or camouflage fatigues, but most wearing civilian clothes.

Bush was accompanied by First Lady Laura Bush, his parents, George H.W. and Barbara Bush, twin daughters Jenna and Barbara Bush and a young man identified only as a friend of the family. Seated in that order, with the president next to the center aisle, they filled the entire front pew on the chapel's right side.

The president wore a dark navy suit and crimson tie. Mrs. Bush wore a robin's egg blue suit. The elder Bush wore a navy suit and blue tie; the president's mother wore a dark pant suit with tan scarf. Jenna was dressed in a black-and-white print skirt, white shirt and light blue, short-sleeved sweater. Daughter Barbara wore a white skirt, peach shirt and light blue wrap.

Assisting Pastor Thomas Preston opened the service by addressing the president's mother. "We appreciate your waking your son up and getting him to church," Preston said. "...He may go somewhere one of these days."

The 55-minute, "traditional Protestant" service was devoted to the story of Jesus's resurrection. The Bible reading was Mark 16: 1-8, which described the reactions of Mary, Mary Magdalene and Salome upon discovering that Jesus's tomb was empty three days after his crucifixion. "Don't be alarmed," the three women were told. "...He has risen."

Pastor Steve Maglio said Jesus's resurrection was an example of turning defeat into victory, and offered a message of reassurance to national leaders and military personnel who must contend with unexpected adversity and uncontrollable events.

"God is with us through every trial we go through in life. He enters the fray with us. He is by our side," Maglio said. "...Christ's resurrection gives new meaning to all of life. Defeat was turned into victory, and Jesus still turns many defeats into victory."

Three hymns were sung: "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," "Jesus Paid It All," and "Rejoice the Lord Is King." The president wore reading glasses and rocked slowly from side to side as he sang.

After his brief remarks to reporters outside the chapel, the president and his family boarded Marine One for the return flight to the ranch, where they were expected to spend the rest of the day.

Warren Vieth
Los Angeles Times

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