

**INDEPENDENCE DAY 2014**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**DEUT. 10.17 ST. MATT. 5.43**

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Freedom is not free...it comes with a cost...and for those who fight and die to protect our freedom...the cost is expensive. We should not take our freedom for granted.

In the Collect for Independence Day we acknowledge God is the source of our freedom and it was he who guided our forefathers in winning the liberties we cherish. We ask him to help us maintain those liberties, to help us use them wisely and correctly and to always work for peace.

Benjamin Franklin once wrote that for America to work its citizens had to be virtuous. For peace and justice to become a reality, we needed to do good things. We needed to show kindness and compassion toward each other, especially to those less fortunate.

The Lesson from Deuteronomy is a reminder to us that in the same way ancient Israel was a stranger in strange lands before it settled in Canaan, strangers in a strange land settled and built up our own country. We must show hospitality to strangers and we must learn how to forgive those who have hurt us.

Sometimes all we want to do is get back at those who have hurt us. The tendency to get even extends even into the Church. The Gospel makes it very clear we are supposed to love and pray for those who have done us wrong. No matter how good an idea we think it is...getting back at those who have hurt us does not work.

Our parish has a long-standing tradition of not bringing partisan politics into the pulpit, discussion groups, or any other parish venue. That does not mean we can or should remain apolitical or pretend we are not affected by events in our country or throughout the world. We use our freedom wisely when we exercise our right to vote.

The Church has to be about the business of being the Church, of showing compassion and love toward others, of taking care of widows and orphans, of feeding the hungry, of housing the homeless, and of praying for peace everywhere, just as the Lesson from Deuteronomy tells us we always should be doing.

Discussions around Church and State interaction have been going on since the time of the American Revolution. Bishop William White was the first bishop for Pennsylvania and the second Anglican bishop consecrated for the United States. He was rector of Christ Church Parish, Philadelphia, for 57 years. That must be something of a record.

Bishop White quietly supported the American Revolution but he was keenly aware many Anglican clergy did not share his sympathies and remained loyal to the Crown. When the American Revolutionary War ended in 1783, most of those clergy chose to stay in the United States and serve their parishes. They did not want to leave their sheep without a shepherd.

At the Church's first General Convention in 1785, Bishop White argued against including prayers in the proposed American Prayer Book that celebrated the American victory over the British. He believed the prayers were divisive, mean-spirited, and would be impossible for those priests who had remained loyal to the Crown to use in good conscience. Bishop White believed the prayers introduced unnecessary partisan politics into the Prayer Book.

Bishop White's efforts to keep the Prayer Book from becoming a political tool were successful and the first American Prayer Book of 1789 contained no liturgical observances for Independence Day. The Collect, Lesson and Gospel we read today were introduced into the liturgy with the 1928 Prayer Book.

But the Prayer Book is not apolitical either. During every Mass we pray for all Christian rulers and magistrates...that includes our own political leaders regardless of party affiliation. We cannot opt out of praying for our Governor or President because we don't like their politics. And we pray for Peace throughout the world in the Collects at Morning and Evening Prayer.

Freedom is not free...it comes with a cost...and the cost for us is to use our freedom and liberties wisely. In doing so we are following Jesus' command...we are trying to be perfect like God our Father in heaven is perfect.

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