

INDEPENDENCE DAY/VI TRINITY 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

DEUT. 10.17 St. MATT. 5.43

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Saint Joseph Parish has a long-standing tradition of rigorously avoiding partisan politics...whether church or secular...in sermons...discussion groups or any other church venue. There is a good reason to maintain this practice...it keeps the Parish working the way it does...it keeps things civil.

When the Revolutionary War ended in 1784, American Anglicans faced a number of challenges. They needed a *Book of Common Prayer* that was both faithful to its English heritage and uniquely American. In 1785, American Anglicans met in convention in Philadelphia and approved a trial American Prayer Book.

The proposed Prayer Book incorporated a Service of Morning Prayer thanking God for political and religious freedom from England. The Convention ordered the Service was to be observed on July 4 in every Anglican parish in the United States...forever!

Bishop William White, the first Bishop for the Diocese of Pennsylvania and the second Bishop consecrated for the American Church, presided at the Convention. He strongly objected to including the Service in the Prayer Book. A quiet supporter of the American Revolution, he also knew the majority of his fellow clergy and a large number of lay people at the convention had been loyal to King George III.

Bishop White believed the inclusion of the Independence Day Service in the American Prayer Book would be divisive...and would alienate and subject those who had remained loyal to the Crown to ridicule. Bishop White did not want to see the American *Book of Common Prayer* become a test for political loyalty. He knew the proposed service would not work.

Thanks to Bishop White's convincing argument, the first American *Book of Common Prayer* of 1789 did not include an Independence Day Service. The Liturgical observance of Independence Day...the Collect, Lesson for the Epistle and Gospel we are using today...came into the Prayer Book only with the revision of 1928.

We can also thank Bishop White for including lay people in the church's decision-making process...still the practice in the Anglican Catholic Church today. Both clergy and laity select bishops at synods and vote on other matters. Considered an innovation at the time...it is more of a restoration to the practice of the Early Church.

The *Book of Common Prayer* avoids partisan politics...church or secular...but it is not apolitical. Anglican Catholic Christians do not live in a vacuum. At 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.

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 and are trying to preserve. We ask him to help us maintain those liberties, to help us use them wisely and correctly and to always work for peace.

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...a tall order in a time when instant gratification from violent acts of terror seems to be the order of the day...but something we must strive for.

We avoid discussing partisan politics at Saint Joseph Parish...whether church or secular...because we must be about the business of being the Church...not a department of state. We are people called to show compassion and love toward others...to care for widows and orphans...to feed the hungry...to house the homeless...to pray for peace everywhere and always...as the Lesson from Deuteronomy tells us we should be doing.

Let us take time today to thank God for those who fought and continue to fight for freedom everywhere...and for the life and work of Bishop William White...whose legacy is felt at Saint Joseph Parish today.

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