

INDEPENDENCE DAY/III TRINITY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

DEUT. 10.17 St. MATT. 5.43

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God...we say in the Collect for Independence Day...is the one by whose power our forefathers won their liberties...and it is God whose help we ask for today to maintain these liberties...by doing those things that are right and pleasing to God...and will lead to peace.

Freedom and liberty are the two words most often associated with both secular and religious Independence Day celebrations. Strictly speaking...Independence Day is not a Church festival...but it is appropriate we thank God for the freedom and liberty we enjoy in this country.

The words freedom and liberty are often used interchangeably...like gift and present...are taken to mean the same thing. We are free to attend Sunday Mass without fear of government interference. Liberty is the freedom the government grants to citizens.

When we talk about freedom and liberty...we think of the American colonies freeing themselves from oppression and unfair taxation and forming a government guaranteeing religious and other liberties. We usually think of freedom FROM something.

We have freedom of choice...we are at liberty to do anything we want...even those things that are clearly against God's will and civil law. There are consequences for those actions in both cases. We are also at liberty NOT to do those things...the better choice!

Saint Peter writes we should not use the liberty we have as Christians...the freedom Jesus bought for us with his blood...to cover up bad behavior. Instead we should use the freedom and liberty we have as God intended...and as the Collect states...TO DO what is right and pleasing to God and to work for peace.

We also have a fundamental duty to pray for our government leaders regardless of party affiliation or what we think about them or their agendas. In the *Book of Common Prayer*...the Orders for Morning and Evening Prayer both contain prayers for the President of the United States and all others in Civil

Authority. We pray that they, too, will use the freedom and liberty won by our forefathers wisely.

Both the Lesson from Deuteronomy and the Gospel are about the practical application of our freedom and liberty...the responsibility we have to show hospitality and love even under difficult circumstances. We should consider them lessons taken from Christianity 101.

During the years the Israelites lived in foreign countries and wandered around, they met many strangers who showed them kindness and gave them food and clothing. We are to show the same kindness to people in need...we are to exercise the freedom to do the right thing...at all times...for everyone...to the best of our abilities...with the gifts God has given us.

We are told in the Gospel to forgive those who have hurt us. It is easier for us as individuals to forgive other individuals who have hurt us than it is for entire nations to forgive other nations. Distrust among nations is not a new thing...it's been around for a few thousand years...and likely will be for a while longer.

But it is only when people and nations start talking and cooperating with each other, that they can begin to work out their differences, and begin to help alleviate poverty, hunger, prejudice, hatred, and suffering in the world, and that true and lasting peace can be realized.

Independence Day is indeed about celebrating our freedom as a Nation and as God's people called to preserve our heritage as Anglican Catholic Christians. It is about thanking God for the liberties our forefathers won for us, and for the wisdom and example of civil and religious leaders who continue to work toward peace in the world today.

Freedom and liberty...when we use our freedom and liberties in the way God intended...we are getting closer to what Jesus tells us in the Gospel we should strive for...to be perfect like God the Father in heaven is perfect.

And let's never stop praying for peace!

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