

Independence Day

Freedom!!! The ability to act, think, travel and worship God according to one's own will. We are free to come to mass this morning without inference from the government. (for now) I didn't have to submit this sermon to a government agency for review. But freedom for Christians means much more than living in a society in which we can say and do almost anything we want.

The Lesson for the Epistle from the Book of Deuteronomy was a reminder to the Israelites that they were strangers in a strange land. Because of the kindness and compassion of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses lived and with God's help led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into their own land, where they were free. God also expected his people to show kindness and compassion to strangers.

Kindness and compassion toward others is what the second part of the Summary of the Law is all about: Love your neighbor in the same way you want to be loved. It is much easier for individuals to show kindness and compassion toward others, than it is for countries to show the same kindness and compassion toward each other. Forgiveness, kindness, compassion and peace

are what we must all pray for... for ourselves... and for our country. They are the building blocks of our nation and what we are about as Christians.

Bishop William White was the first bishop consecrated for the State of Pennsylvania. During their many visits to Philadelphia, George and Martha Washington attended Christ Church Parish, where Bishop White was rector for fifty-seven years. Another historical figure is buried at Christ Church, Benjamin Franklin.

There were many Anglican priests in the post-revolution America who remained loyal to the Crown. Most of them chose to stay in the new United States of America rather than return to England or go to Canada, because they didn't want to leave their parishes without a priest. They were shepherds and they had sheep to take care of.

In 1785, American Anglicans held their first General Convention. The proposed American Prayer Book included a service of Morning Prayer that celebrated the defeat of the British by the Americans. Bishop White supported the American cause, and he was a pastor and shepherd to many including his priests.

He knew that no priest in America who remained loyal to the Crown could in good conscience conduct such a service. Bishop White believed to force him to do so would be mean-spirited and unkind. He didn't want the Prayer Book to become a tool for someone political agenda. In the end, Bishop White prevailed. The American Church would have to wait until the 1928 revision to see lessons included for Independence Day.

We need to pay attention to the collect and epistle especially. They tell us much about how we should be using the freedoms our founding fathers won for us; taking care of orphans and widows; loving strangers; making certain that people have enough to eat and clothes to wear. This is what Saint James calls pure and genuine religion.

Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They were no longer strangers in a strange land. Jesus freed us from slavery of sin and death. He paid the ultimate price for our freedom with His blood, and He made certain our true citizenship in heaven. How do the citizens of heaven act? We act with love and compassion toward others, and forgive others just as God has forgiven us.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul also reminds us we are no longer strangers wandering around with no place to go. Paul calls us citizens who together are God's people and members of the family of God. "You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Jesus Christ Himself."

We are blessed by God to live in a country where we can worship him in Word and Sacrament as Anglican Catholics. The same can't be said for Christians everywhere. So we do need to pray continually for the work of the church around the world. And our freedom to worship God comes with a responsibility to go out into the community to teach and preach the Good News about Jesus to all who will listen.

It is fitting and proper for us to ask God, our Father, on this Independence Day to continue to bless our country and to make it prosperous and peaceful. Let us also follow the example of Bishop William White. Let us ask God to give us his grace so we can show kindness and compassion toward others as he expects from us, whose true citizenship is in heaven.