

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

7 Pentecost  
July 3, 2005  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**"Two Hundred and Twenty-nine Years Ago..."**

**Two hundred and twenty-nine years ago**, tomorrow, our Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence in Liberty Hall, Philadelphia. When they did so, they went to war against the greatest power in the world at that time.

A million books have been written about that moment in world history. No doubt as you went through school and college you got to read some of them.

Today I would like us to reflect on why it was also an important moment in the life of every Christian. In today's Gospel Jesus prays: "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

When you study the history of Europe in the 17th & 18th century you realize why so many people left and came to America. They saw America as a new world, a new chance, where they could find peace, worship their God and where they could raise families.

Ordinary, decent men and women who believed in the Bible, God and Jesus as their Savior, they left behind wars, religious persecution, heavy taxation, monarchies and hierarchies. Everything they owned they now held in two or three bags. More than anything else they carried a conviction that European life was not the life Jesus had asked his disciples to live in the New Testament.

I always see 1776 as the year these little people said: "NO!"

"No we won't go back to being peasants under a monarch. No, we won't go back to being overtaxed, just because you see us now as worthy of your interest. No, we won't go back to churches and values that do not come from the Gospel."

So here we are **two hundred and twenty-nine years later**. We have come through two world wars and we have come through the Great American Century. What have we learnt? Surely, it is that America has a soul, and what makes her great has little to do with guns or armies, ships or planes. What makes her great is the true goodness of her little people worshipping their God and reaching out to others as the Lord Jesus told them to do.

Beyond wealth, possessions and the hunger for success, when you strip it all away, what is left? Is it not our faith, our hopes, our friendships and our families? Americans do something on holidays without even realizing they do it. They revert to those early American immigrants and they gather as family around the table or the barbeque. Once

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more, if for only a few hours, they forget about money, jobs and wealth-making and they cherish being together.

A family meal becomes important because it symbolizes that we all do care enough about one another to put everything else aside and spend time with one another.

I spent time this week in Milford Cemetery. It is a very beautiful place; it's probably one of the most peaceful, beautiful cemeteries in the north east. While I was there I noticed how families like to be buried together all in one place. Some have a grave or plot together; others are buried in a circle. Coming away I thought "these people knew something. That when everything else is gone, we only have each other. No matter our achievements, our titles, degrees or the size of our car or house; when life is over we can all only occupy a casket or a small box.

Jesus' message in the Gospel is to tell his followers that there is a different road to travel in life, and there is a different treasure to seek.

"Store up treasure for yourself in heaven, where no moth can consume, no thief break-in."

Jesus is speaking of the values and virtues that he has been trying to teach his disciples; forgiveness, tolerance, compassion, love, freedom, caring, generosity, kindness and peace.

They are the things those Early Americans came to this country seeking. They are the treasure we fought so hard to enjoy. They are the gifts of God some men cared about so much for in 1776 they were prepared to die for them. **After two hundred and twenty-nine years** are they not worth fighting for again? For I believe that when virtue dies or is forgotten, some thing will choose to take its place. Whether you believe Satan or the Evil One places them there, is another thing.

Throw out forgiveness and brokenness will take its place;

forget about tolerance and racism and bigotry replace it;

do not practice compassion and love and you are left with indifference and coldness.

Caring, generosity and kindness are the marks of our Christian families. Without them we lay as silent and cold as the graves in Milford Cemetery.

Throw out freedom, true freedom and you can only replace it with one word, slavery.

Would we do that? Would we replace the freedom and treasure of the Gospel for slavery to money, wealth, our house, the car, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs or the values of a consumer society?

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Jesus in the Gospel says: "don't do it. Can you not see, even the children know what you do not know?"

Place your faith in trust. Children trust, we too must trust. Trust the words of the Gospel, the words of Jesus. Trust in your God that when you let go of everything God will be your salvation.

In 1776, they seemed to know that when they wrote: "In God we trust..."

There probably is no more patriotic nation on the face of the earth than the United States of America. Every village and town will prove that again tomorrow with parades, fairs, ceremony and fireworks. Yet, I wonder if they all know what we are truly celebrating. The fact that we are free to come to church and worship; that we can pray in public to our God; that we can hold these truths to be self evident that all men and women are created equal.

We have won the war against fascism. We have won the war against communism. But can we win the war against evils of our day that can destroy us from within?

This holiday let us keep our children just a little hugged tighter to us. Let us tell our spouse, we love them and cherish them. Let us hold on to Grandma and Grandpa a little longer while we still have them.

In 1776 one and a half million colonists knew that a fight was coming. In secret rendezvous and churches up and down the land they mustered and readied their guns. From woods and cabins young men came running to answer the call.

**Two hundred and twenty-nine years** later we too have to know that there is a fight coming. It is a fight worth winning. It is a fight for the winds and hearts of young America. Like our Fathers before us we must arm ourselves. Not with pious platitudes, but with words. With the words of Jesus and the collective wisdom of our Christian Fathers. We must teach with all our skills or lose the fight to win the hearts of our children over to all that is good, all that is best, in the message that Jesus shared with us.

All you who have carried the flame of faith in your life must know that it falls to you to be the first teachers of your children.

It is a sacred duty, that when it is your turn to rest, you will have passed on the flame that will light the children's way, thro' the darkness; to that Kingdom Jesus invites us all to share.

Happy Holiday.  
Amen+

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