

6 Pentecost  
 July 4, 2010  
 Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“With God on our Side! And Our Backs to the Sea!”**

Any of you who have been following the events of the World Cup in South Africa, must have become aware of the ups and downs of soccer and soccer teams. The celebrations of yesterday are so quickly replaced by the despair of defeat the next game. The excitement of the knock-out stage of the tournament, revolves around the fact, that fate, luck and mistakes can be the thinnest of margins between loss and victory.

In the Old Testament, the same would be said of Israel. One moment she is up, and triumphant as a nation; the next she is down and in despair, often defeated and left wondering how God could allow his chosen people to fall so hard and so low.

In our own lives too, fate, luck and mistakes are often the ingredients that mark the changes in our fortunes. We ponder those fortunes when misfortune, serious illness and even death strike.

The readings today tell us a story of hope and salvation, we find it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Kings, where God comes to the aid of the most unlikely recipient of his love. Naaman is the commander of a foreign army, an enemy, and he possesses an incurable disease. Yet, it is Naaman, who is chosen as an example that the God of Israel can intervene in the lives of men and women and bring healing and salvation. The author’s message is clear: “If Yahweh can heal and change the fortunes of this disbeliever, this foreigner, this Pagan General, how much more can he do for us who love and serve him?”

In a week when we are reflecting on the events that occurred 234 years ago, that changed the fortunes and destiny of the 13 colonies, this is not a bad question to ask? “Did God bless America in the past and has the destiny of the nation been determined by God’s response to prayer and the cry of a good people to be allowed to live in freedom and without tyranny?”

On August 27, 1776, Washington and his entire Continental Army occupied fortified defenses on Brooklyn Heights with their backs to the East River. His army of 10K faced General Howe with a force of 20K who had landed from Staten island. The British Army prepared to attack, knowing that defeating the Continental Army here would end the Revolution. The day before the Battle the British numbered 32K with British Navy warships patrolling the Sea lanes and the East River. But on the night of August 29<sup>th</sup> a mysterious fog descended on the East River and Washington evacuated his entire army in small boats to Manhattan and on to escape to New Jersey and then to Pennsylvania and Valley Forge.

The American soldiers believed that they had been delivered and that God had answered their prayer when death was staring them in the face. Disbelievers will say it was nothing of the kind, but mere luck that played a part in the birth of a nation.

Saving 10K men without loss is a considerable feat.

Of course the battle had other lessons, nothing good ever comes out of Staten Island, and if you do ever have to go to New Jersey, be sure it's only to get to Pennsylvania.

Perhaps, we too can see the hand of God intervening in our destiny also.

What were you doing on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1960? Well, on that day, Richard and Doris Rogers were getting married. John Kennedy was president in the White House; in Berlin the Communists built a 12 foot wall dividing East and West Berlin; Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria lay behind the Iron Curtain; in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning of the 7<sup>th</sup> game in the World Series, Bill Mazzerki of the Pirates, hit a home run to beat the Yankees 10-9.

Since then, the Berlin wall has fallen down, the Iron Curtain is no more, Yankee Stadium, the House Ruth built, was torn down, John Kennedy sadly died tragically young and 50 years later for better or worse, richer or poorer, Richard and Doris are still married.

I am sure today as they renew their vows and we pray for them and their family in this Eucharist, they too will be able to look back and see the hand of God in their lives also.

St Paul tells the people of Galatia: from the 2nd reading: "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, wherever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."

Those words, written 2,000 years ago sum up the grace of Richard and Doris' lives. Not only in what they have given to their family, but in what they have given to their church in love and service.

In the Gospel Jesus sends 70 of his close disciples out to the villages and towns where he intended to go. They go full of enthusiasm for the mission. They go full of the joy of Jesus' Gospel message. They go feeling that with God's help they can do anything, even change the world in Christ's name.

We all felt like that once. We all felt the passion of the Gospel, and that feeling of youth that with God's help anything is possible.

Anything is possible. By now, older and wiser, we should all know that. We have seen things you and I over the last fifty years. We have seen the Holy Spirit work his magic in peoples lives. We have seen thousands of Americans respond to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, more in Haiti, we have seen the response to 911, we have seen great movements brought about by the endurance of the human spirit, from women's rights to Civil rights from the end of Apartheid to the defeat of Communism.

We know today on the 234<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our nation, that our challenges are different. Today we fight to return our country to being a Godly people. We are challenged, as never before, to protect the values of our founding fathers, where "liberty, equality and justice" where values they thought

worth living and dying for.

Today, we too have our backs to the sea, as we beg our politicians to rule by these same values. We want them to live by moral rules, our children can emulate. We want to be able to trust our banks. We want a fair deal for the American worker. We think that the battle cry of 1776, "No taxation without representation" should apply to Congress and State and local government, who lay on our tax shoulders more than we can bear, giving us little nothing in return.

Most of all we are challenged to win back the hearts and minds of our children, to see value in marriage, love, loyalty, forgiveness, peace, God and the enduring beauty and grace of this great country.

Give us that. Win that battle and we will have won a great victory, write that victory into our history books and the 4<sup>TH</sup> of July would become a holiday of great celebration.

As today we pray for Doris and Richard, let us also pray for our nation. May God bless her and keep her, protect her in his abiding love.

Amen+