

Homily for July 4, 2010 (14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C)
Isaiah 66:10-14c; Psalm 66; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20
St. Joseph Parish, Saginaw, MI

Interdependence Day?

Today our country celebrates an important event in our nation's history: the Continental Congress' approval of our Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. To some extent, it also celebrates a myth, for no person much less any country, can be completely independent. This is especially true today, when technology enables children here in the USA to learn in the same virtual classrooms as their counterparts in China, South Africa and Brazil and the economic woes of Greece and Portugal cause anxieties on Wall Street.

It was also true in 1776. Our founders recognized this even in their Declaration when they wrote:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government....

We are dependent on each other; and the government we have is more or less the government we choose—or at least the government we tolerate. Our most fundamental rights are gifts from our Creator. The recent BP Oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has caused some tensions between Great Britain and its former colony; but our nations' leaders recognize that we still have a "special relationship." We're still trading partners. The roots of our legal system are thoroughly British. We have been allies in two world wars and today we are fighting together in the Middle East. We are, in truth, far more *interdependent* than we are independent.

If our independence is something of a myth in our relations with people and nations, it is undeniably so in our relationship with God. In the extreme, it is the definition of hell itself: eternal separation from God. The people of Israel had their own bitter taste of this during their exile to Babylon. As a result of their own idolatry, their desires for earthly power, and their desire for independence from God and his covenant, God allowed them to be overwhelmed by a stronger enemy. Their best and brightest were carried off to a foreign land. Jerusalem was laid

waste and the Temple—the place where they believed God would forever dwell as their protector—was destroyed.

As they returned to a place they could barely recognize, God offered a word of comfort. In our First Reading from Isaiah, the prophet uses the image of a mother breastfeeding and comforting her child—the antithesis of independence. We depend on God. As St. Paul once proclaimed to the people of Athens, quoting one of their poets, “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28a).

Having experienced true freedom in Christ, Paul wanted to contrast the boasting/pride that some put in circumcision and their adherence to the Law of Moses with his own reliance on the saving power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. For Paul, the mark of circumcision was an illusory sign of “do-it-yourself salvation,” while his own “marks of Jesus” were a sign of what Christ had done for him through his cross and resurrection and the cost of responding to that grace.

Just as there is no such thing as “do-it-yourself” salvation, there is no “do-it-yourself” discipleship or church. Jesus recognized this himself when he appointed seventy-two more disciples to complement the work of the Twelve. He saw that the potential harvest of those who could be transformed by the proclamation of the gospel was far greater than the number of disciples sharing in his work of preaching, teaching and healing. He was well on his way to Jerusalem, he knew that his time was running out, and he needed to hand on his mission to others who would continue to carry it out—and to do so *together*.

In an era in which there are over a billion Catholics worldwide and even more people whom the Church could reach with the Good News, we are finally starting to take seriously the need to rely not just on priests, deacons and religious but also lay men and women, young and old, to be ministers who are:

- *Nourished* by a “full, conscious and active participation” in the liturgy (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 14).
- *Trained* to claim their baptismal roles as “everyday evangelists.”
- *Ready* to step up with urgency, wishing peace and relying on Providence to supply their needs—a bold act of faith in an era when many churches in places like Saginaw are trying to survive and thrive in a tough economy.
- *Trusting* that the Lord will also give them the power they need to triumph over the serpents of doubt, the scorpions of despair, and the “full force of the enemy,” in whatever form it may take.

In concluding the Declaration of Independence our nation’s founders wrote:

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Even in declaring their independence from a king, they had to acknowledge their dependence on God. May we not forget it, either. +