

Independence Day

July 4, 2005

Deuteronomy 10:17-21

Psalm 145 or 145:1-9

Hebrews 11:8-16

Matthew 5:43-48

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I recently heard from my cousin Bill in California. Actually, he now calls himself Chuck, which is fine by me.

He wanted to tell us that his son, Roger, has just entered a Russian Orthodox seminary in Pennsylvania. It's not that any of us are Russian – Roger has been teaching in Northern California for years, and there's a very strong Russian presence there – I guess. I must tell you that Bill/Chuck's other child is his daughter, Hillary, who is 6 feet 5 and gorgeous and is a dancer in Las Vegas – she was actually at the Folies Bergère in Paris for some years. We have a picture of my Aunt Irma, now in her nineties – not tall – clutching her purse – standing beside tall Hillary – mostly feathers – beaming like any proud Grandma.

Now when I say that none of us are Russian, I must tell you that Bill/Chuck discovered his Scottish heritage rather late in life and took to wearing kilts. All things are possible in California. Bill/Chuck is himself 6 feet 5 and skinny, so you have a picture of bony knees sticking out of a kilt.

I have a vision of their family reunion.

I mention all this because you may remember Bill – in those days – as the cousin I grew up with – spent every summer with. We were usually at my Grandfather's summer home on a lake in Wisconsin. My grandfather had emigrated from Norway – the dream of all Norwegians is to have land. The first thing they do is to build a cottage and put up a flagpole, all of which he had done.

Bill was the creative one – a would-be inventor. He really did perfect invisible ink one time – something to do with milk, as I recall.

At any rate, the most memorable 4th of July in my childhood was the year that Bill thought to invent his own fireworks, actually just one firework as a big surprise to all adults present. So he took a brown paper bag and filled it with confetti. Into that he inserted strings of little firecrackers – called ladyfingers – with all the entwined fuses sticking out of the bag. His plan was to wait until dark when the adults present were sitting outside conversing. He would then throw this firework into their midst. They would, of course, be surprised and delighted.

As predicted, darkness fell, and the adults were seated in lawn chairs enjoying the evening. It was so peaceful; all the stars – a gentle breeze – all the fireflies. Bill came stealthily across the lawn, bag and match in hand. He lit the fuses and lobbed his invention right over their heads.

It had been an exceptionally dry summer that year. The confetti, ignited by the firecrackers came down in a hundred individual flames onto the dry, dry lawn. The adults were indeed surprised. They all ran around stamping out fires on the lawn. My grandfather said words in Norwegian I had never heard before, and never since. Bill was nowhere to be found.

Now, so that you don't think this tale has no theological significance, it seems to me that it's all a fair description of just how Jesus can come into our lives. We do like our calm and our comfort, but

sometimes, as we are relaxing in our personal metaphoric lawn chair, Jesus lobs his own fireworks into our midst, and we are called to action – perhaps even stamping out fires. That's my experience. It can be scary but never dull.

And what happened to Bill? Actually, Bill/Chuck moved to California and cofounded a company from which he recently retired. It's called "Explosive Technology, Inc."

In His Holy Name.