

Independence Day

July 4, 2007

Deuteronomy 10:17-21

Psalms 145 or 145:1-9

Hebrews 11:8-16

Matthew 5:43-48

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

We are a strange nation – a very improbable assemblage of peoples from all over the globe – peoples with very different backgrounds and philosophies and expectations. Some of us are very recently arrived; some come from stock that has been here a very long time indeed. But we must remember that no matter who or what we are, our people came from somewhere to be part of this nation.

Why did they come? There are all sorts of reasons, but all those reasons are summed up in the phrase “seeking a better country.”

What is a better country? The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that a better country is a “heavenly country,” a nation whose architect and builder is God; a nation with firm and deep foundations. Those foundations are, the Deuteronomist tells us:

A nation that is not partial.

A nation that takes no bribe.

A nation that executes justice.

A nation that loves the stranger.

A nation that worships only God; holds fast to God.

Mark tells us that it is a nation that renders unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's, and knows the difference.

How are we doing after all these years? We have our moments.

We began with a flat, incontrovertible statement that all people are created equal – all people. That doesn't leave much room for partiality.

We began with a constitution and a set of amendments that lay out quite clearly that we are a nation built upon laws, and that everyone is entitled to equal protection under those laws – that money or position or power should not set anyone above those laws. We have a statue of justice that is blindfolded, a symbol of legal impartiality.

We put a big statue in the New York harbor, a gift from France, a symbol of liberty raising a beacon to the world, and wrote on its base "give me your tired, your poor . . . I lift my lamp beside the golden door." It was a moment in which those who had been strangers in this land could see their own beginnings in the eyes of the immigrants and would share the bounty of this nation.

Are we perfect as Matthew tells us we must be, just as our Father is perfect? Of course not. Can we try; can we do better? Oh yes.

Do we lose sight of our past, caught up in the trials and terrors of the present? Momentarily, yes, I think. But there have been trials and terrors throughout the history of this nation and dark times that seemed to have no end – but they did end. And little by little those ideals that are the very firm and deep foundation of this nation have been recovered and endured.

That takes work, and it's your job and mine to look back on the ideals and strengths of the past, assess the present and shape the future to be that "better country."

In His Holy Name.