

Independence Day

July 4, 2008

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.

“Help us, O Lord, to finish the good work begun here.” We will pray that together soon; it’s one of the prayers set aside for this day. It says two things about us.

First, it says that we, as a nation in this world, are a work in progress; we aren’t finished yet. We have come a long way, though, from the days of our formation as a people.

This country was founded in revolution: that’s a well-worn phrase. When we hear it, we think of the trials and the heroics of a great struggle with Great Britain, winning our independence. There was another revolution just as, perhaps even more, significant.

The other revolution was in the minds and the hearts of the people. That revolution had to do with the nature of humanity itself. The document on which we rest our identity talked about the right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” That was itself a revolutionary idea. It elevated humanity; it said that we have choices and decisions to make about the present and the future, that we participate in the decisions that shape our lives and our world. Those very rights have been praised and asserted in other places and at other times, but here, in this nation, they have remained the active center of our understanding of ourselves.

That is the beginning; how are we to finish this work we've been given?

Consider our Baptismal Covenant: we, as a people, acknowledge our belief in and dependence on a higher power, God. Then we make some promises.

We promise that, with the help of God, we will "persevere in resisting evil," and that when we do fall into sin, and you know we will, we will repent and return to God. Nations can sin as well as people, of course, and nations can repent as well.

We promise to "proclaim the good news of God in Christ," a nation demonstrating to the world that it is possible to forgive, possible to make sacrifice for others, possible to live in peace and in harmony, and that all humanity are cherished children of God and have His love.

We promise to "seek and serve all persons," to "love our neighbors." That promise does not concern just the family next door or the people down the block; it means our global neighbors with whom we share this earth, and it calls us actively to seek ways to better their lives, not for our own gain or glory, but for the love of God.

We promise to "strive for justice and peace," and we promise to "respect the dignity of every human being." Every human being! In a world of respect, there can be no have-nots, no impoverished nations, no exploitation, no wars.

Can you visualize such a world, a world in which the agendas of God and Caesar are the same? Can you visualize a nation that truly shines forth the Christ light? Can you visualize it all beginning in such places as this with such people as you and me?

If so, you can visualize the completion of the work we have begun.

In His Holy Name.