

Independence Day

July 4, 2009

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.

Our grandson Erik graduated from Hayfield High School in Alexandria, Virginia. Hayfield is huge, at least by my standards. The ceremony took place in the gymnasium; we sat on bleachers, very tall bleachers, along with several thousand other parents, grandparents, and assorted friends. It was packed.

Alexandria is, of course, a suburb of Washington. To say that the area is ethnically diverse would be an understatement. There is a really rich and exciting mixture of peoples there, and in Hayfield and in those bleachers.

A Pakistani family was seated in front of us, all in what we would call their national costume and they would call clothes. They were chatting in what I think is Urdu. Behind us was a family from Africa. Obviously, at least one was attached to an embassy of their African home; the others were, I think, in town for the graduation. The former was explaining everything in what was, perhaps, Swahili.

It was obvious that they were all absolutely delighted to be there. The school orchestra, a big orchestra, played "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"; I can tell you that no matter what language all those

Pakistanis and Africans and others had been speaking, they really took off on “Glory, glory, hallelujah.”

Does that sort of thing happen in every country? Can that sort of thing happen in much of the world?

I really wonder just what it is that can meld so many different people with such profound cultural differences into one happy, singing crowd. What is so different about this nation? What makes us attractive to others? Not every nation needs an agency to deal with foreigners that won't go home.

I know the cynical response that we hear all the time is that we have money: by the standards of most of the world, we are, even in a recession, really, really rich. Our world is filled with material goods; we have an incredibly high standard of living.

All of that is probably, but not uniformly, true, but there is something else: there is an underlying truth about this country that allows such things to be true. It's a philosophy, an ethos, a worldview.

We acknowledge the value and dignity of every individual. We say, and have said since the very inception of this country, that people, all people, have certain “inalienable rights”: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, rights endowed by “our Creator.”

Endowed by our Creator; given to each of us by God.

Those are “inalienable” rights: rights that are not to be trifled with, not to be taken away from us under any circumstances. How much of the world is at the mercy of self-serving, capricious men or organizations? We have the right to a “Life.” We do not see people as expendable. Life is precious; life is not to be wasted.

We have the right of “Liberty.” We can say what we please, go where we wish, read what we like, dress as we wish; we take all those things

for granted while much of the world cannot even conceive of such freedom.

And we have the right to the “Pursuit of Happiness.” That’s not self-centered amusement: that’s self-fulfillment, upward mobility, the chance to better yourself, the chance to do and to be what you will.

No, we are not perfect, but we know where perfection lies. It lies in the unwavering practice of these principles. And you can be sure that Pakistanis and Africans and all the peoples of the world know that too.

That’s the thought for Independence Day.

In His Holy Name.