

Homily - 14th Sunday of the Year C (INDEPENDENCE DAY)

The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." Jesus said, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power to 'tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

With these words from our Gospel passage, (Lk 10:1-12, 17-20), we celebrate the Weekend of July 4th, Independence Day. Independence is about freedom; it is worth celebrating. Christ's disciples celebrated their freedom from the dominion of Satan. Jesus endorsed their celebration but directed them and us to rejoice more about transcendental salvation, the ultimate freedom in heaven. Thus, our independence celebration is not just about external and physical displays and parades. Even more, it is about the high ideals upon which our beloved nation is founded (justice, peace, equality and liberty for all); ideals based on Gospel values. Thanks to our founding fathers! The Scripture states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Our beloved founding fathers have pointed out to us, their "children", through the document of the Declaration of Independence, the path we should follow, the way of the Lord. Let us not depart from it!

There has been intermittent hue and cry against the addition of the phrase, "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. The opponents contend that it is unconstitutional. What? This country was founded through the grace of God, at least, from the perspective of the founding fathers. Has God become unconstitutional? This reminds me about a Catholic Chaplaincy within a university campus in Nigeria. It has a big crucifix mounted in front of it. After many years, an Islamic chaplaincy was erected opposite the Catholic Chaplaincy. A few years later, the Muslims students started complaining and petitioning for the removal of the crucifix. What? Why did you accept to erect your chaplaincy opposite it in the first place? What a joke! Beloved, the crucifix is our Christian symbol of "spiritual independence" in Christ. It is the "Statue of Liberty" of the entire Christian world! Hence, St. Paul declares in our Second Reading (Gal 6:14-18), "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

The debate against the phrase, "under God", prompts one to ask, "How did our founding fathers conceive of our independence?" For them, independence means independence from the domination of the Kingdom of Great Britain

and any other human powers. It was not and will never be independence from God. In fact, the text of the Declaration even recognized independence as an entitlement from God. It states that all properly founded nation-states responded to the right "to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them." It emphasized the place of creationism, stating, "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." Finally, it placed its promise for all future Americans on God, stating, "We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions" "What then is unconstitutional about "under God" in the pledge of allegiance?" Or "Will anyone dismiss the Declaration of Independence as unconstitutional?"

We must avoid biting the fingers that fed us. Those who fought for the founding of this great country at the altar of shedding their blood attributed their victory, the victory we enjoy today, to God. How then can anyone seek to work against their interest, attempting to create a "new America" where God is irrelevant in education, political, social and cultural life? According to George Washington,

I am sure that never was a people, who had more reason to acknowledge a Divine interposition in their affairs, than those of the United States; and I should be pained to believe that they have forgotten that agency, which was so often manifested during our Revolution, or that they failed to consider the omnipotence of that God who is alone able to protect them. (<http://www.quotesdaddy.com/author/George+Washington/3>).

On the whole, let it be known that God is never an impediment to our freedom. For "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2Cor 3:17). And "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Let us also recognize that it is not enough to celebrate freedom. We must put our freedom to use for the glory of God. Let us emulate the example of the early Christians who used the period of the "Roman Peace" (*Pax Romana*) to spread of the faith throughout the entire empire. Let it not be said that the Christians in China, with the Church "underground" through a state-sponsored repression, is doing better in evangelization than those of us who live in the land of the freed. "To whom much is given much is expected." We must not become complacent with our freedom. "America! America! God shed His grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea.... America! America! God mend thine every flaw, confirm thy soul in self control, thy liberty in law."