

**HOMILY**  
**Independence Day**  
**July 4, 2006**

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**St. John the Evangelist Parish**  
Davison, Michigan

The United States of America is 230 years old today. That's a long time for a nation to remain free. But when you look at our history in the context of world history, America is just a child among the nations. Egypt, China, Japan, Rome, Greece, all make America's history seem so short. Consider what a brief time we've really been here as a nation. When Thomas Jefferson—one of our Founding Fathers—died, Abraham Lincoln was a young man of seventeen. When Lincoln was assassinated, Woodrow Wilson was a boy of eight. By the time he died, Ronald Reagan was a boy of twelve. The lives of four men can take us all the way back to the beginning of our country, 230 years ago. We are so young.

And yet we stand tall among these nations because of the principles upon which we were established . . .

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”*

Thus begins the Declaration of Independence that we celebrate today. And celebrate indeed. God has truly blessed this nation of ours. There are not many places where people can gather as we do today to worship together out here in the open and, just as importantly, to live our faith day by day as we so choose. We are truly blessed. What a precious gift.

With every gift, there comes a cost. The deep red in the American flag represents the blood and tears shed by so many fellow Americans to insure the freedoms we have today. Many of those who serve our country, then as now, are fellow Catholics. Their gift reminds us that with freedom comes great responsibility.

On his last visit to our country, Pope John Paul II said, “Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having to do what we ought.”

When our country was just born, Alexis de Tocqueville said it best when he realized at the very beginning of our national life, “America is great because America is good; if America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.”

By no means is our work done as a nation. There are many issues that challenge us today: the culture of death that allows abortion and capital punishment, the massive national debt, the high cost of health care, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the battle over immigration, the threat of terrorism, the care of the earth upon which we live, growing interdependence among the peoples of the world, and so much more.

The Bible says much will be expected from those who have been given much. Before I could vote, John F. Kennedy was the President. I’ll never forget his speech: “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.”

*We are not free to live excessive lives.*

*We are not set at liberty to pursue selfish ends.*

*We are called to act with justice.*

*We are called to love tenderly.*

*We are called to serve one another—to walk humbly with God.*