

Independence Day ~ July 4, 2010
The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Not long ago, a group of youngsters was questioned on what they liked about the United States.

Jackie, age 9: "We've got more stuff and things in America than anywhere in the world. We have pizza, too, and it don't grow any other place on Earth—except maybe Italy."

Elliott, age 7: "Everybody wants to live in America because we own the Moon. The president bought the Moon from God for a million dollars, and I saw him send spacemen up on TV."

Tina, age 6: "America is great because we have the most plumbers in the world. That's because we've got more tubs. I want to be a plumber like my uncle cause he's real rich."

And Lew, age 6, brings us back down to Earth. When asked what he liked about America, the youngster replied, "What's America?"

As a nation we thank God for our freedom. Freedom is a precious gift that our fathers and mothers paid dearly to secure for us. Have you ever thought of the cost of our independence?

Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. Their conviction resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families.

Of the 56 men, five were captured by the British and tortured before they died.

Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.

Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army.

Another had two sons captured and never heard from again.

Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in poverty.

What does it mean to be an American? It means that others have given their life's blood to forge out this free land. We dare not take their sacrifices for granted.

Let's think for a moment about what the gift of freedom means for our lives. Freedom carries with it responsibilities. It has become a cliché, but it is true: Freedom is not free.

Once upon a time there was a family named Brill. They are living off the hard work of the grandfather. Archie, the father, is a mural artist who never paints any murals. The young men are forever chasing after improbable jobs that won't amount to anything, and their sisters are forever chasing after males who will never amount to anything either.

The Brills are bound to each other by unhealthy dependences, but it is their mother, Clothilde, who epitomizes the family. She spends most of her life lounging on couches and asking, "Why doesn't anyone take care of me, Darling? I get tired of doing everything for everybody. It would be nice if someone would take care of *me* for a change."

The problem is that everyone in the family says the same thing. Each in his or her own way. The Brills have one thing many of us long for: economic freedom. But their so called freedom has robbed them of their sense of responsibility.

We need to remember the saying of Abraham Lincoln: "He who is not concerned with freedom for others will not long enjoy it himself."

Without a sense of responsibility to our families, to our communities, to God, we waste away emotionally, morally, spiritually. Freedom carries with it responsibilities.

Freedom also carries with it consequences. The freedom to drive a car carries with it the terrible weight of responsibility for the damage that a car out of control can do. The freedom to eat what you choose carries with it the responsibility to choose healthy foods and not to overindulge.

The paradox of our time in history is that we spend more, but have less. We buy more, but we enjoy it less. We have bigger houses and smaller families; however, we also have less time. We have multiplied our possessions, but how have we reduced our values? We've learned to make a living, but not a life. We've added years to life, but have we added life to years? We've done larger things than any other nation, but are we doing better things? We've cleaned up the air, but have we polluted the soul. We plan more, but accomplish less.

When he visited 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 have to do what we ought.”

Freedom means that we reap what we sow. it is one of the primary laws of life. If we sow a good life, we reap a good life. If we sow an excessive life, we reap accordingly

I think we’ll close with an observation made in the eighteenth century by the author of “The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic,” and it sends a chilling warning today. The author, Alexander Tytler, found that ancient democracies waned under the selfishness of human hearts. He wrote: “The average age of the world’s greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence:”

From bondage to spiritual faith;
From spiritual faith to great courage;
From courage to liberty;
From liberty to abundance;

From abundance to selfishness;
From selfishness to complacency;
From complacency to apathy;
From apathy to dependency;
From dependency back to bondage.

You know, as well as I, that our nation has lost in the last 20 years a great deal of its purpose, its gentleness, its kindness. We need to look again at who we are and where we are going. So today, on the 234th anniversary of the birth of our country, are we living as we should and, if not, how can we do better?

