

## HOMILY

### *The Fourth of July -- 2009*

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Our nation has been wonderfully blessed. It goes without saying that I am proud to be an American. For many of us, it was an accident of birth. I had nothing to do with it. Deep in my heart, I can say that I am grateful to be a resident of this land.

In one way, the essence of America can be summed up in a conversation between a dad and his son. The father told his son that all Americans belong to a privileged class. The son said, "I disagree." And the father said, "That's the privilege."

Nevertheless, the Fourth of July is a dangerous day...dangerous not because of fireworks or reckless driving or swimming accidents. It is a dangerous holiday because it can blind us to our real needs. We can congratulate ourselves on being rich and be utterly blind to our poverty.

There are several temptations that continually confront the American people. The first temptation is to enjoy the fruits of citizenship without tending the Tree of Liberty.

Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a sermon years ago entitled, "Parking on Another Man's Nickel." (Obviously, the sermon was preached years ago. Where can you park for a nickel today?) The idea is still sound. You come to a parking place that has a meter. Someone else has already inserted a coin. Happily, there is still some time on the meter. This must be your luck day. You pull in and park on someone else's nickel or quarter or whatever.

Some of us go through life parking on someone else's nickel. This is particularly true of us who are born into this free land. Someone's already paid in blood, toil, tears and sweat for our parking place. The temptation is to enjoy our good fortune without taking our responsibility for those who come after us.

A father showed his son a copy of the Bill of Rights. “Remember, son,” he said, “on the back of every right there is a responsibility.”

Is he right? How about you! Are you parking on someone else’s nickel? This is the first temptation: To enjoy and fruit of freedom without tending the Tree of Liberty.

The second temptation is to not have compassion. Consider the inscription on the Statue of Liberty:

*“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

*(Emma Lazarus)*

We cannot forget the people who cannot compete—people at the bottom of society. If the government will not do its part, then we, the people, must. I think it was Ronald Regan who said, “If we lived by the Golden Rule, there would be no need for other laws.”

As George Bernard Shaw once wrote: “The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that’s the essence of inhumanity.”

The early Church had such a powerful love for others that Luke records that “*Abundant grace was upon them all.*” They were experiencing the joy of serving, the joy that doesn’t wear a price tag. A service that counteracts the greed that has put us where we are today. That’s why I am so excited and humbled by the upcoming Catholic Heart Work Camp. Over three hundred youth and adult chaperones will be here on campus. They are coming from twenty different parishes.

It’s not a free ride. With monies earned from projects, they each pay a fee to be part of the work camp. Monies to not only offset they food but to buy supplies to rebuild, repair, and repaint various sites around Genesee and Lapeer Counties. They will be sleeping on the floor in the Family Center.

In closing, let us call to mind a challenging concept. French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, after visiting America in 1831, wrote:

*“I sought for the greatness of the United States in her commodious harbors, her ample rivers, her fertile fields, and boundless forests—and it was not there. I sought for it in her rich mines, her vast world commerce, her public school system, and in her institutions of higher learning—and it was not there. I looked for it in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution—and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good; and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great!”*

