

Ordinary C 14. July 6, 2025. And. 4th of July weekend.

This weekend, the celebration of our country's birthday, offers us a moment to reflect on ourselves as a nation, on our history and our origins, our failures, our future.

Yet we remember, we reflect on our identity as Americans, in a radically different context from others in our civil society.

We mark our nation's birthday, as members of the Catholic, the universal, Church. We gather here as those who profess our faith in Jesus Christ; we celebrate the 4th of July as people whose ultimate allegiance belongs not to any political, economic or social system, but to God's reign, God's Kingdom, and God's righteousness.

That allegiance relativizes our standing in civil society, making us both its sharpest critics and its most loyal patriots, in the best sense of that sentiment. For our mission is to call our nation to be its best self.

I remember seeing an editorial cartoon in the Hartford Courant, some years ago, that depicted a child asking Uncle Sam, “What do you want for your birthday?”

And an overweight Uncle Sam, snacking on a drumstick, in front of a car stuffed with bags of money, declares, “I want more.”

Well, we want more for our country---but not merely an ever-increasing Gross National Product or greater consumption.

We want ours to be a nation of more justice, more peace-making, more human nobility, more decency.

We want our people to embrace the gift God has bestowed upon us, life, liberty, the pursuit of our ultimate happiness, which is union with God.

Like prophets in every age, we call our nation to turn away from its culture of death.

Christians have lived under a myriad of political and civil regimes, sometimes in peace, sometimes under persecution; but always in some tension, because our faith in Jesus Christ makes radical demands on us.

We may not compromise with the pretensions of any other power.

For Christians are given to the world to be, in the imagery of Jesus, light, salt, leaven.

We are vessels of God, as God breaks into human history and radically transforms the earthly city into the New Jerusalem.

So, quite rightly, with parades, songs, fireworks, we celebrated this weekend our origins and self-understanding as Americans; but here, we once again pause to consider our citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

What is this Kingdom, to which we give our ultimate allegiance? If it is “near,” if it is “at hand,” as Jesus declares in today's Gospel, by what shall we recognize it?

Briefly, three characteristics emerge from that scripture.

First, the coming of the Kingdom brings healing to the sick, salvation to those broken and in pain. Hence it is Good News.

Second, to those who hear and put faith in that Good News, to those who welcome that Good News into their homes and their hearts, the coming of the Kingdom brings peace, peace which abides, and creates peace in all whom it touches.

Finally, the coming of the Kingdom breaks the power of the Satan, the accuser. For Jesus comes not to condemn sinners with the weight of the Law, but to heal and to reconcile.

So, with the coming of Jesus, the Satan, who seeks to keep us chained in our evil, no longer has any place in God's reign. His power is broken, forever. He is cast out.

And so, in hope and expectation, we whom God joins to that Kingdom look forward to the vision Isaiah recounts in our first reading---at last, the establishment of a place where peace and justice reign in all lands.

And that expectation, that Christian hope, is not naive optimism, not simplistic trust that each day things are getting better and better.

For as Saint Paul reminds us today, at the center of God's Kingdom stands the cross of Jesus Christ, the instrument of forgiveness.

Those who enter the Kingdom do so only to the extent that they enter into the mystery of Christ's own sacrifice, His self-giving, atoning love.

It is from the Cross, taken up for the sake of others, that comes true healing, genuine peace, final freedom and liberation from evil's stranglehold.

Forgiveness is a risky business. Those whom God chooses to be disciples of Jesus are, like Jesus himself, set in radical opposition to all that enslaves and dehumanizes our brothers and sisters, even their own evil-doing.

We are set against all that oppresses and enslaves and robs them of their dignity as children of God. Such opposition to the powers of evil, greed, indifference and hatred, puts us "in harm's way," and leads to the possibility which Jesus embraced, the Cross.

Yet "blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice;" precisely to them belongs the Kingdom of God. For it is the Lord's own Spirit, in whom we now live, who frees us to embrace that risky vocation, to take up the Cross, to be vessels of God's coming Kingdom, in healing, peacemaking, overthrowing evil and building justice.

And it is to that Kingdom, and in his power, and for God's glory, that we are invited and called.

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of the Cross.

The Power of God is the power of bread broken and wine shared among friends.

The Glory of God is God's people, fully alive in the very life of God.

So, as we gather at this Eucharist, let it be our prayer that this be our Independence Day---the day that God sets us free of fear and selfishness and sin; and God transforms us in the image of Jesus, so that we too will be bread and peace and healing, for our nation and our world.

For thus we shall see the fullness of God's reign and God's justice established in our midst, in this land which God has so richly blessed.

And the people of God said, Amen.