

Part I – A Nation Receives Its Creed

(Today)Yesterday, millions of Americans gathered beneath summer skies. Families spread out blankets on the grass. Children waved little flags. The smell of backyard barbecues filled the air. As darkness fell, eyes turned upward as fireworks illuminated the night.

Every year we celebrate the Fourth of July with great joy. Yet amid all the celebration, I sometimes wonder how many of us stop to ask a deeper question.

What exactly are we celebrating?

Is it simply the birth of a nation?

Or is it something more?

Two hundred and fifty years ago, a small group of men gathered in Philadelphia and signed a document that would forever change the course of history. They pledged to one another "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor." They knew they could lose everything—even their lives. Yet they believed some truths were worth dying for.

That raises another question.

What were those truths?

What made ordinary men willing to risk everything?

Those questions become even more interesting when we listen to today's Gospel.

Jesus has just experienced rejection. Many who had seen His miracles refused to believe Him. The religious leaders, confident in their own wisdom, dismissed His message. Yet instead of responding with anger, Jesus lifts His eyes to His Father and prays:

"I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to little ones."

At first, those words can sound surprising.

Is Jesus criticizing education?

Certainly not.

The Church has always treasured learning. She built universities, preserved the wisdom of the ancient world, and gave us saints like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and John Henry Newman.

Jesus is not contrasting intelligence with ignorance.

He is contrasting **pride with humility**.

The proud believe they already possess the truth.

The humble know that truth must first be received.

That single lesson changes everything.

We live in a world that constantly tells us to create our own truth, define our own identity, and decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. **Jesus teaches exactly the opposite.**

Truth is not something we invent. It is something God reveals. Freedom begins not when we write our own rules, but when we humbly receive the truth He has already given.

Surprisingly, that same principle lies at the heart of one of the greatest experiments in human history.

Chesterton Discovers America

Nearly one hundred years ago, the great English Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton traveled to the United States on a lecture tour. Chesterton was one of the most brilliant Christian thinkers of the last century. C.S. Lewis credited him with helping lead him toward Christianity. Archbishop Fulton Sheen admired his insight, and Pope St. John Paul II often quoted his writings.

But before Chesterton ever crossed America by train...

Before he ever lectured in her cities...

Before he ever reflected upon her greatness...

He first arrived at her doorstep.

Like every traveler entering a new country, he expected the ordinary questions.

"Where were you born?"

"How long do you intend to stay?"

Instead, the immigration officer asked something entirely unexpected.

"Do you believe in anarchy?"

"Do you intend to overthrow the government?"

"Do you practice polygamy?"

Chesterton later admitted that he almost laughed.

Why would an immigration officer ask questions like that?

Then it struck him.

America was doing something far greater than checking passports.

She was protecting the principles upon which she had been founded.

The questions were really asking:

"Will you embrace the ideals that hold this nation together?" whether you are traveling through America and making you home in it: "Are you willing to assimilate—not merely into our customs, but into the truths that make us one people?"

That experience stayed with him.

And as Chesterton crossed America by train, watching forests, mountains, farms, cities, and endless prairies roll past his window, he found himself pondering a question that most Americans never stop to ask.

What makes someone an American?

England belonged historically to the English.

France to the French.

Italy to the Italians.

Each nation had been formed by a common ancestry, a common language, and a common history.

America was different.

People had come from every corner of the earth.

They spoke different languages.

They brought different customs.

They shared no common ancestry.

So what could possibly unite them?

At last, the answer became clear.

America was not held together by blood.

She was held together by a shared belief that certain truths belong to every human person because they come from God.

Those truths were beautifully expressed in the opening words of the Declaration of Independence: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that governments exist not to create those rights but to protect them.

Notice how beautifully that echoes today's Gospel.

The Founders did not claim to invent these truths.

They claimed to receive them.

Just as Jesus teaches that truth comes from the Father and is revealed to the humble, so the Founders understood that human dignity does not come from kings, governments, or majorities.

It comes from God Himself.

That realization eventually led Chesterton to one of his most famous observations:

"The melting pot must not melt."

He was not speaking about immigrants.

He delighted in America's diversity.

He was speaking about the **pot**.

People could come from every nation, every language, and every culture.

But if the principles that held them together were ever forgotten, the nation itself would begin to come apart.

History gives us a striking example of why that matters...

Only thirteen years after the American Revolution came the French Revolution.

On the surface, they looked remarkably similar.

Both spoke of liberty.

Both rejected tyranny.

Both sought a new beginning.

Yet they were built upon two very different foundations.

America declared that our rights come from our **Creator**.

France gradually declared that man himself would become the measure of all things.

The results could not have been more different.

As the Revolution unfolded, churches were desecrated. Notre-Dame Cathedral was transformed into a Temple to the Pagan Goddess of Reason. Priests and religious were imprisoned or executed. The guillotine became the terrible symbol of a revolution that promised liberty but instead produced fear and terror.

History reminds us of an important truth:

Freedom cannot survive once it is separated from truth.

The Church has always made that distinction.

There is a difference between **liberty** and **license**.

Liberty is the freedom to choose what is good.

License is simply doing whatever we want.

One builds civilization.

The other eventually destroys it.

That is why St. John Paul II taught that freedom is not merely the ability to choose, but "**the right to do what we ought.**"

Those words prepare us for someone who reflected deeply on both the Gospel and the American experiment.

His name was Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Part III – Can a Nation Lose Its Soul?

Nearly forty years after G.K. Chesterton visited America, another great Catholic voice asked a question that still echoes today.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen looked into the homes of millions of Americans through the new medium of television and asked a simple question:

"Quo Vadis, America?"

"America, where are you going?"

It was not a political question.

It was a spiritual one.

Sheen loved his country. He believed America had accomplished something remarkable in human history. Here was a nation founded not upon bloodlines or dynasties, but upon the conviction that every human person possesses a dignity given by God Himself.

Yet because he loved America, he was also willing to warn her.

He often said that what we celebrate every Fourth of July is not simply a **Declaration of Independence**.

It is also a **Declaration of Dependence**.

At first, that sounds almost contradictory.

Wasn't the whole point of 1776 to become independent?

Politically, yes.

Spiritually, no.

Read the Declaration carefully.

The Founders appealed to "**the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God.**"

They declared that our rights are "**endowed by their Creator.**"

And before signing their names, they placed their trust in "**the protection of Divine Providence.**"

That was no accident.

The Founders understood something we are in danger of forgetting.

If our rights come from God, then no government can legitimately take them away.

But if rights come only from government, then government can redefine them whenever it chooses.

That is why America has often been described as **the American experiment**.

It was an extraordinary experiment in ordered liberty—the bold conviction that a free people, recognizing that their rights come from God and living according to the moral law, could govern themselves.

The Founders never imagined that this experiment would succeed automatically.

A constitution can restrain power.

It can establish checks and balances.

It can distribute authority wisely.

But it cannot create virtue.

Only a virtuous people can remain truly free.

John Adams recognized this when he wrote:

"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

The success of the American experiment would never depend solely upon the brilliance of its laws.

It would depend upon the character of its citizens.

Every generation would have to decide whether it would preserve the principles upon which the nation had been founded or slowly allow them to disappear.

Experiments do not fail because their principles are false.

They fail because those entrusted with them cease to believe in those principles.

That is why Ronald Reagan could say:

"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

The same is true of the American experiment.

It will not endure automatically.

Every generation must receive it, renew it, protect it, and hand it on.

And that is precisely what concerned Archbishop Sheen.

He warned that civilizations rarely collapse from the outside first.

They decay from within.

Long before armies are defeated...

Families begin to unravel.

Long before economies fail...

Integrity begins to disappear.

Long before constitutions are rewritten...

Consciences become silent.

People stop believing there is any objective truth worth defending.

Sheen once lamented:

"Our nation is too full of those crying, 'Down! Down with the schools. Down with the churches. Down with teachers. Down with government. Down with the police.' Can you build anything down? You cannot!"

His point was not that every institution is beyond criticism.

His point was that destruction is always easier than construction.

Anyone can tear down.

It takes wisdom to build.

It takes humility to build.

It takes sacrifice to build.

Families are built.

Parishes are built.

Communities are built.

Civilizations are built.

The same is true of disciples.

No one accidentally becomes holy.

Holiness is built day by day through prayer, repentance, fidelity, and grace.

The renewal of a nation begins with the renewal of the human heart.

The renewal of society begins with the renewal of the family.

And the renewal of the family begins when men and women once again place Jesus Christ at the center of their lives.

That responsibility now belongs to us.

It belongs to parents who teach their children to pray.

It belongs to husbands and wives who remain faithful when marriage becomes difficult.

It belongs to priests who preach the Gospel without compromise.

It belongs to every Christian who chooses truth over convenience, holiness over comfort, forgiveness over resentment, and Christ over the spirit of the age.

The future of the American experiment will not be determined only in Washington.

It will be determined around family dinner tables.

It will be determined in our homes.

It will be determined in our Catholic schools and religious education classrooms.

It will be determined every Sunday when families decide that worshiping God is more important than another game, another errand, or another weekend away.

For every nation is ultimately held together by something greater than itself.

And that leads us to an even greater truth.

If America has a creed that has guided her for two hundred and fifty years...

The Church has a Creed that has guided her for two thousand.

And in just a few moments, before we approach this altar, we will stand together and profess it.

Part IV – The Creed That Saves

If America has a creed that has guided her for two hundred and fifty years, then the Church has a Creed that has guided her for two thousand.

And in just a few moments, we will stand together and profess it.

"I believe in one God..."

"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ..."

"I believe in the Holy Spirit..."

Those words are so familiar that we can easily recite them without thinking. Yet they are among the most important words we speak all week.

Notice what we do **not** say.

We do not say, "These are my opinions."

We do not say, "These are the beliefs that work for me."

We do not say, "These are truths I have chosen."

We simply say,

"I believe."

The Creed is not something every generation rewrites.

It is something every generation receives, professes, lives, and hands on.

For nearly two thousand years, Christians have professed this same faith.

Saints have died for it.

Missionaries have carried it to the ends of the earth.

Martyrs have sealed it with their blood.

Empires have collapsed.

Kingdoms have disappeared.

Governments have risen and fallen.

But the Creed has endured because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

That is why today's Gospel matters so much.

Jesus does not invite us to invent a new truth.

He invites us to receive Him.

He says,

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

Every one of us is carrying something.

Some carry grief.

Some carry anxiety.

Some carry loneliness.

Some carry regret.

Some carry wounds no one else can see.

Christ does not pretend those burdens are imaginary.

He simply says,

"Bring them to Me."

Then He says something that seems almost impossible:

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

A yoke was made for two.

The stronger carried the greater weight.

That is the image Jesus gives us.

He never asks us to carry life alone.

He places Himself beside us.

He bears what we cannot.

He gives strength where ours fails.

That is why Christian freedom is unlike the freedom the world offers.

The world says freedom means having no master.

Jesus says real freedom comes from belonging to the right Master.

Because every human heart serves something.

Some serve money.

Some serve success.

Some serve pleasure.

Some serve power.

Some serve politics.

Some even become servants of themselves.

Only Christ can say,

"My yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Because only Christ leads us not into slavery, but into the freedom of the children of God.

As we celebrate two hundred and fifty years of our nation's founding, we should thank Almighty God for the blessings He has bestowed upon America.

We should pray for our elected leaders.

We should honor those who have sacrificed to preserve our liberties.

And we should continue to do our part to renew the American experiment by living lives of virtue, raising our families in the faith, and seeking first the Kingdom of God.

But we must never forget that no earthly nation, however great, is our final home.

Rome fell.

Empires disappeared.

Borders changed.

Civilizations passed into history.

Christ never promised that America would endure forever.

But He did promise that **His Church would.**

"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

That is where our ultimate hope rests.

Not in presidents.

Not in political parties.

Not in constitutions.

But in Jesus Christ.

For He is the One from whom every human person receives his dignity.

He is the source of every authentic freedom.

He is the Truth we do not invent but receive.

And in just a few moments, He will come to us—not merely as an idea to admire, but as a Person to receive.

The Founders pledged **their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor** for the birth of a nation.

Christ gives us something infinitely greater.

He gives us His Body.

He pours out His Precious Blood.

He makes us not merely citizens of an earthly republic, but sons and daughters of the Kingdom of God.

And so, my brothers and sisters, as we give thanks for the blessings of these past two hundred and fifty years, let us pray with humility.

For though we are far from perfect, though we have stumbled, and though we have learned much over these past two hundred and fifty years, may we never cease striving to become a people ever more faithful to the truths we have received and the God who revealed them.

May we always remain humble enough to remember what our Founders understood so well—that our rights come from God, our dignity comes from God, our liberty comes from God, and our hope rests in Him alone.

May we prove worthy stewards of the great American experiment they entrusted to us, handing it on to the next generation with greater faith, greater virtue, and greater gratitude than we ourselves received it.

And now, as we come forward to this altar, may we receive not only the Creed upon our lips, but Christ Himself into our hearts—the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the source of every authentic freedom, and the King whose Kingdom shall never pass away.

May the mountains of this great land lift our eyes to heaven, may the prairies teach us to bow our heads in prayer, and may we remain a grateful people—proud of what is noble, repentant for what is sinful, and faithful to the truths we have received and May God Bless our Great country, from sea to shining sea.