

## FREEDOM NOT SERVITUDE

There is a preface written especially for the United States which can be used at Mass on our nation's birthday. It sums up beautifully not only the intentions of our founding fathers, but the aspirations of all peoples created by God:

*Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well to sing your praise for ever, and to give you thanks in all we do through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*He spoke to men a message of peace and taught us to live as brothers. His message took form in the vision of our fathers as they fashioned a nation where men might live as one. This message lives on in our midst as a task for men today and a promise for tomorrow. We thank you, Father, for your blessings in the past and for all that, with your help, we must yet achieve. And so, with hearts full of love, we join the angels today and every day of our lives, to sing your glory in a hymn of endless praise: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, etc. . . .*

There is also another preface written just for the United States Church which puts our celebration this weekend more in a scriptural setting. Though composed for a unique American celebration, Thanksgiving, a day set aside by a proclamation from President Lincoln as a day on which to thank God for all he has done for our country, especially in helping us to preserve its unity and ending a civil war.

*Father, we do well to join all creation, in heaven and on earth, in praising you, our mighty God through Jesus Christ our Lord. You made man to your own image and set him over all creation. Once you chose a people and gave them a destiny and, when you brought them out of bondage to freedom, they carried with them the promise that all men would be blessed and all men could be free*

*What the prophets pledged was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, your Son and our saving Lord. It has come to pass in every generation for all men who have believed that Jesus by his death and resurrection gave them a new freedom in his Spirit.*

*It happened to our fathers, who came to this land as if out of the desert into a place of promise and hope. It happens to us still, in our time, as you lead all men through your Church to the blessed vision of peace.*

*And so, with hearts full of love, we join the angels, today and every day of our lives, to sing your glory in a hymn of endless praise, (Holy, Holy, Holy, etc..)*

These two prefaces help put today's celebration in the far greater context of God's ultimate plan for all human beings no matter where they live. As citizens of our country, we all desire to live in freedom, but given the moral climate of today, just how many citizens really know what freedom is? Do they want freedom or do they want license? Freedom has parameters and obligations while license infers that one can do whatever they please regardless of limits. The culture today which is totally materialistic and totally self-serving proclaims that one has an absolute right to be happy at all times, and if this is not the case for one, then there are drugs, alcohol, sex, you name it available so that one can achieve their goal. Is this living? Is this the real ultimate answer and solution? One has only to look around and see the countless number of broken lives, shattered

hopes, deep despair and even ultimate suicide. And then there is the plethora of those willing to make a living off these people, pushing them to deeper and deeper chasms of hopelessness, draining them of all their financial sources and then simply abandoning them with no regrets or feelings whatsoever. Is this what our founding fathers envisioned? They were realistic in facing the future and they did try to make provisions for those who would misuse freedom. But what they never envisioned was just how in the future there would be those who for whatever reasons, wanted God absolutely out of the picture!

The founding fathers came from lands where religion was regulated by the state and freedom of faith was unknown. They had seen firsthand how religion and faith were twisted into its opposite where control was the desired goal rather than actual praise of and faith in a God. Persecutions were rampant, mostly hidden but at times quite in the open. And so when our fathers met together to form a new nation, they all wanted freedom for religion, for faith, never envisioning that this would one day be turned into freedom from religion, freedom from any God, with all the resulting confusion which so predominates modern life in our Country. Why so many seem to want God out of every aspect of national life is hard to understand. What would drive a person to such a way of thinking? No doubt the answer involves the understanding first of all of faith in God and what this really means. But more fundamentally, it is a true lack of understanding just what freedom truly means.

Open rebellion against God is still not a driving force and the intention of most, but there are an ever increasing number of persons who are working through the justice system to eliminate any mentions of God whatsoever, even to the point in some places of doing away with swearing to God to witness to the truth. Just what are these people afraid of? Our faith tells us and teaches that we have a loving God, a forgiving God, a God who truly cares about having all his human creatures really enjoy life to the full. It also teaches that our God went to the ultimate extreme of becoming a man like us in all ways, sin excepted, and who then ultimately gave his life that all his followers could live forever with him in his eternal kingdom. This is not a God to fear; this is a God to love.

So on this weekend amidst all the speeches and fireworks, all the barbecues and games, all the joy and love of being together with family and friends each one of us should quietly reflect on just where does one stand, just where does one agree with the founding fathers, just where does one's faith enter into the whole fabric of our country, just where can each of us make a difference. These are decisions which perhaps cannot be made today, but they are decisions which one must make one way or another if they truly love their country, agree with the founding fathers and want their children to grow up as good citizens and men and women of standing.

The ultimate decision is not that complicated and can be summed up in simply striving to live what one truly believes, not just in faith, but in all that it means to be totally human as God created us to be, to use one's talents and abilities to help others rather than just oneself, to grow in the belief that each one is a real somebody, not just a number, a faceless citizen, a statistic. This may not be complicated, but it does involve facing one's self honestly, facing the fact that one's belief in God is real and makes a very real difference in all one does, and admitting that one needs their God, that they cannot go it alone! This may seem impossible, but once tried, one begins to see a whole new side of life and begins to become what they were created to be, plus sensing a real and intense joy!

Fr. Andy, S.J.

