

# THE PASTOR'S CORNER

## CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE DAY

*"I repeat my fervent supplications to the Supreme Ruler of the universe, and Sovereign Arbiter of Nations that his providential care may still be extended to the United States so that the virtue and happiness of the People may be preserved and that the Government that they have instituted for the protection of their liberties may be perpetual."*

**I****N HIS EIGHTH AND FINAL STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS** to Congress (on Dec. 7, 1796), George Washington spoke of the nation's indispensable relationship to the Lord. This weekend's happy confluence of our remembrance of the Declaration of Independence and our celebration of the Sabbath, our first president, whom James Thomas Flexner called "the indispensable man," was a person of deep faith: "There is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an inseparable union between virtue and happiness, between duty and advantage. We must always be convinced that the kindly smiles of Heaven, can never be expected for a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." (Washington, *First Inaugural Address*, April 30, 1789)

Washington was, it has been said, "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen". Having fought a war, one of his central concerns as President was to keep the country united and in peace. Though an Anglican, he was firmly committed to religious freedom and once reflected that had the Constitution in any way diminished the liberty of anyone to the free exercise of their faith, he would never have signed it. He was known to have visited many different churches, including both Jewish congregations and Roman Catholic Churches. After his inauguration, the Catholic faithful of the new United States of America, led by its first bishop, John Carroll, congratulated Washington with a heartfelt gratitude. Returning the sentiment, he wrote, "I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part

which you took in the accomplishment of their Revolution, and the establishment of their Government, or the important assistance which they received from a nation in which the Roman Catholic faith is professed." Visitors to his home at Mount Vernon, in Virginia, may have noted a painting of the Virgin Mary in the Washington's dining room.

He was quick to acknowledge Divine Providence's role in his own life: "By the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability and expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt, altho' death was levelling my companions on every side." (*Letter to John A. Washington*, July 18, 1755)

Well aware of the new nation's blessings, he also understood its obligations to its Divine Benefactor: "I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation." (*Circular to the States*, June 8, 1783)