

[Readings: St. Thomas, July 3rd: Eph. 2:19-22, Ps.117; John 20: 24-29]

It has been 246 years since the United States declared its independence from the British Empire and claimed its status as a nation. Our Founding Fathers and Mothers established America with recognition of man's religious nature and an expectation that Christian belief would animate the new country's civic life.

Although that Christian foundation has not kept our nation from the scourges of slavery, nativism and civil war, thanks be to God, U.S. citizens -- through much effort -- overcame them. Today, we find ourselves facing different national challenges, but no less destructive: the COVID-19 pandemic, a fractured economy, a divided nation, segregated races. We pray and sing, "God bless America," and one church marquee sign controversially says, "God will not bless America when we legalize sin."

But, as always, God provides His grace in any age: Thanks to technological advances and the proliferation of pro-life apostolates, secular and religious, the human dignity of a person from conception to natural death is the force behind so many organizations and apostolates. The majority of U.S. citizens now consider abortion morally wrong, and in some states this conviction has helped usher in bold new laws to protect unborn children and their mothers. There are voices in all levels of politics and the Church who are working for authentic immigration reform while protecting national sovereignty. In spite of violent protests and brutality, legislators are working to combat the racism that still pervades our country. Voices of reason, clarity and charity can rise above the shrill noise and turbulence and serve as vehicles for constructive debate.

This Independence Day weekend, let our collective memory be jogged on the ways that Christian faith has been a bedrock of our nation and a force for change.

We are reminded on this Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle that we "are no longer strangers and sojourners, but are fellow citizens with the holy ones, and members of the household of God." We are "being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." The construction work still goes on!

The birthday of our country is an opportunity to take to heart again Thomas Jefferson's words -- adapted from St. Robert Bellarmine, who wrote 150 years earlier "All men are equal, not in wisdom or grace, but in the essence and nature of mankind" reflected in our own Constitution as: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

At a time when religious practice has sunken low, let us also remember St. Robert's words, as we pray for our country: "Political power emanates from God. Government was introduced by divine law, but the divine law has given this power to no particular man... Men must be governed by someone, lest they be willing to perish. It is impossible for men to live together without someone to care for the common good."

The month of July in the Roman Catholic tradition is dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus. There is a special Litany for that devotion. The Litany of the Most Precious Blood was approved for public use in 1960 by Pope John XXIII, although devotion to the Precious Blood goes back centuries.

The Litany of the Most Precious Blood pays tribute to the blood our Lord both shed for us in His Passion and offers us in the Eucharist for our salvation. It is important to remember that the host we consume at Mass is indeed the body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ! (Although the wine at communion is "my blood of the new covenant" as our Lord put it at the Last Supper (Mark 14:24) the host as the body of Christ contains our Lord's blood as well.) I would like us to pray that now, offering it for our country.

The Litany of the Precious Blood

Lord, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us. *Christ, graciously hear us.*

God, the Father of Heaven, *have mercy on us.*

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, *have mercy on us.*

God, the Holy Spirit, *have mercy on us.*

Holy Trinity, One God, *have mercy on us.*

Blood of Christ, only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, *save us.* (after each line)

Blood of Christ, Incarnate Word of God,

Blood of Christ, of the New and Eternal Testament,

Blood of Christ, falling upon the earth in the Agony,

Blood of Christ, shed profusely in the Scourging,

Blood of Christ, flowing forth in the Crowning with Thorns,

Blood of Christ, poured out on the Cross,

Blood of Christ, price of our salvation,

Blood of Christ, without which there is no forgiveness,

**Blood of Christ, Eucharistic drink and refreshment of souls,
Blood of Christ, stream of mercy,
Blood of Christ, victor over demons,
Blood of Christ, courage of martyrs,
Blood of Christ, strength of confessors,
Blood of Christ, bringing forth virgins,
Blood of Christ, help of those in peril,
Blood of Christ, relief of the burdened,
Blood of Christ, solace in sorrow,
Blood of Christ, hope of the penitent,
Blood of Christ, consolation of the dying,
Blood of Christ, peace and tenderness of hearts,
Blood of Christ, pledge of Eternal Life,
Blood of Christ, freeing souls from Purgatory,
Blood of Christ, most worthy of all glory and honor,**

**Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,
*Spare us, O Lord.***

**Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,
*Graciously hear us, O Lord.***

**Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,
*Have mercy on us.***

**V. You have redeemed us, O Lord, in Thy Blood.
R. And made us, for our God, a kingdom.**

**Let us pray:
Almighty and eternal God, You have appointed Your only-begotten Son the Redeemer of the world and willed to be appeased by His blood. Grant, we beg of You, that we may worthily adore this price of our salvation, and through its power be safeguarded from the evils of the present life, so that we may rejoice in its fruits forever in Heaven. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. GOD BLESS AMERICA!**