

[Readings: Isaiah 57:15-19; Ps. 85; Philippians 4:6-9; John 14:23-29]

The American Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

But what do we mean when we hear words like “freedom” and “independence?” For too many of us, St. John Paul II says it means pleasure, selfishness and directly immoral actions. He said that these are the false ideals of liberty and happiness. Left unchecked and unchallenged, these deadly things will be the cause of the fall of this nation and others. Watching the news, it looks like we are in overdrive, heading for Armageddon and Hell fire! But that’s not the full story, nor is it the end of the story, unless we make it so.

For others it means “doing whatever I want to do, whenever I want to do it.” It means “saying whatever I want to say when I want to say it.” It means, “I want it, and I want it NOW.” If a two-year old behaved like this, what would we call them? Spoiled, right? And what does “spoiled” mean? No good, inedible, rotten. That’s what so many have done with the words “freedom” and independence. “I don’t need you and you don’t need me. To each his own.”

The former leader of India who was martyred, Mahatma Gandhi, had an expression that fits this description. He calls them, the Seven Deadly Things that will Destroy Us. They cross all religious and political lines. They involve us together. They are social and they are political, and they are based on natural principles and laws.

They are: Wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce (business) without morality (or ethics), science without humanity, religion without sacrifice and politics without principle.

The best thing we can do as grateful Americans on this Independence Day is to prepare for the August primaries and the November elections. To register to vote, to gather information, to form our consciences and then take prayerful and deliberate action.

The Michigan Catholic Conference reminds us to research Catholic teachings about poverty, health care, education, work and immigration. We are also reminded that all issues do not carry the same moral weight, and that the moral obligation to oppose intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our conscience and on our action.

Look up who is running for office in this area and where they stand on the issues. Then take all of this to prayer and discernment.

This is the best way we can say “Happy 248<sup>th</sup> Birthday” to our country, and to salute those American giants, veterans and heroes upon whose shoulders and sacrifice this great nation stands. And to challenge those political candidates and policies that fall short.

There is a patriotic song out for many years now called, “I’m Proud to be an American.” It is currently being used by one of our presidential candidates at his campaign rallies. I would like to propose that just as you and I are proud to be Americans, we should be equally proud to be Catholics.

Just this week, I read about a new [study of religion](#) produced by the Washington Post. The study surveyed religious practice based on

anonymous cellphone data. The Post's article about the study begins, "When you map the primary religion in every county in America, the Catholics always stand out."

We show up everywhere, which is not much of a surprise, since we're still America's largest single religious group.

That reality comes with a heavy call. God has entrusted us with the special and sacred duty of evangelizing our country.

You may be surprised to learn that President Gerald R. Ford addressed the attendees of the 41st International Eucharistic Congress held in Philadelphia in 1976. He [told](#) participants, "For millions of men and women, the Church has been the hospital for the soul, the schoolroom for the mind and the safe depository for moral ideals." Those words ring even truer now, 48 years later.

President Ford also said, "We are rightly concerned today about the rising tide of secularism across the world." That rising tide remains both a challenge and a summons. Even more so today.

Share the joy of your faith and bring the healing light of the Gospel to a dark world, wounded and weary from sin. The exciting thing is that the further our country moves away from religious faith, the more brilliant the light of the Gospel can shine through us.

Who would dare claim that the real Truth can be known and loved today? Only [the Church!](#)

Who would claim something more radical still: that the real Truth is a person who knows and loves us? Only the Church!

Another good thing we can do as we celebrate our independence as a nation, is to declare once again our **DEPENDENCE**. To declare our dependence on GOD as the highest

goal of our lives. To realize that not only are politicians imperfect beings, but that each one of US within the Church are imperfect beings.

We are imperfect beings, a “work in progress” who rely on a perfect God for our daily bread and for the ongoing conversion of our hearts. To declare once again, our dependence on the CHURCH, whose wisdom and channels of sacramental grace guide us daily. Who leads us to that Kingdom which is the greatest of all kingdoms, the divine nation which is the greatest of all nations. To lead us into eternal life with God in Heaven.

May God bless us, and may God bless America! AMEN!

[Readings: Jer. 23:1-6; Ps, 23; Eph. 2:13-16; Mark 6:30-34]

Authority. I used to think that only by children, teens, and young adults rebelled against authority. Now, as we become more educated and sophisticated, it seems that people of all ages – “from eight to eighty” are saying, “No one is going to tell ME what to do!” Authoritative attitudes don’t help the situation. Remember when we were growing up, and Mom or Dad would say to us: “Do you hear me?” I was too young to respond: “Is that a rhetorical question? I’m not deaf. You are not mute. Yes, I heard you!” Had any of us kids responded that way, Bang! Zoom!

Or how about this one: “Because I said so!” That would end the discussion or the debate. Do you remember promising yourself that you would NEVER say this to your kids when you had them? “Because I’m your father!” “Because I’m your mother!” Reason enough. And when those words came out of YOUR mouth for the first time, did you phone your parents and apologize? Did you tell them that they were RIGHT?

Why is it then, that when God’s Word says so, or the Church says so, we still question their authority? Are we smarter than God is? Are we smarter than 2000 years of experience as a Church? How ludicrous and pompous it is when we think that way.

Taking our cue from Jesus, we see that APPROACHABILITY is the key to effectiveness in ministry and in life. Unlike some of the other religious leaders of His day who kept a “proper” distance from sinners and from the ritually unclean, Jesus moves easily among people of every social class and both genders.

He touches the sick, converses with sinners and empathizes with the voiceless, the marginalized, all who were looked down upon as being “un-cool” and unimportant. Jesus smells like His sheep. Rather than assume a position of authority, Jesus allows His message to be authoritative while using a manner of delivery that was gentle, even meek. Rather than make His importance felt by demanding honors, Jesus serves the needs of other in such a manner that they feel important to Him and important to God.

He is patient with the weaknesses and failures of those He chooses to share in His ministry. Jesus helps each of His disciples become their best selves in His presence. He does not coerce or force them. Each is free to respond to His loving overtures or not to respond.

Jesus leads with strength and conviction, but not with force. For that reason, some of his audience does not believe that He is the true Messiah. Jesus is a shepherd, not a sovereign. Even when we call Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

What kind of a world would we have if our secular and political royalty saw themselves as shepherd-leaders instead of political powers? So many of our medieval saints were kings and queens, princes and princesses who saw their authority as having been given to them not by popular vote but by divine command. Today, even in our own country, some of our leaders see themselves as gods and not as servants.

Once that crown was on their head, the royal saints of old realized not how much politics, power and prestige they had, but that one day the crown would be removed. It would be placed at the footstool of a Divine King. Then they would stand before Him on Judgment Day to make an accounting of what they did with what they were given on earth.

I don't remember the last time in recent history that a President, a Supreme Court Justice or a member of Congress spoke such words. They will be subject to the same dying and the same accounting as the royal saints.

The events of last Saturday have painfully shown us that political discussion in the United States has devolved – DEVOLVED -- into people shouting at and not listening to each other. This shows us the need to promote respectful dialogue despite political differences. We no longer speak respectfully of each other or to each other; we are shouting at and shooting at each other. Politics has divided friends, separated families and ended countless lives of those who try to follow the teachings of Jesus and the morality of the Bible.

One thing that all of us can do is to remember and to promote the dignity of the human person. Even if someone disagrees with me, he or she is still

created in the image and likeness of God. And, therefore, has a dignity that I have to recognize and that I have to respect. If people were more aware of their common-held dignity, then we might be able to discuss as rational human beings, the issues, problems and disagreements that we have, and perhaps come to some solutions.

What would Jesus do? Exactly what I just said!

Think about the strength that your faith in Jesus gives you. How can you draw on that strength more? Like Paul, do you see Jesus as the source of your peace? What kind of peace does Jesus offer?

In Jesus Christ, we find our salvation, and we find a way forward. Obviously, in the person of Christ, we find a code of conduct and behavior. The more we do to promote that, the better off our society will be. We can't do it all by ourselves, but we can certainly lay a foundation and urge those that we support and elect to promote this dignity and this dialogue.

St. Paul reminds us in our Second Reading that each human person has within themselves the struggle between good and evil, between service and violence, between sin and grace.

How often do WE feed our heads with anger, prejudices, and jealousies? One of the greatest things we can do for ourselves and for others is to help them (and us) put the hurtful things in our lives on the table so that they can be dealt with openly and honestly, sometimes with the help of an objective third party. That is the only way true healing can take place. This is how the "wall" within us is torn down. By Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us that in the redeeming flesh of Christ, the former division is now past. The wall is down. All blends into one. And it is redeemed, made holy. Isn't it a lot easier for you and me to let go and let God help us to heal, to be whole and holy again? To be His shepherd leaders in our Church, in our family, in our parish community, and in our country? God bless America! AMEN!

[Readings: 2 Kgs. 4:42-44; Ps. 145; Eph. 4:1-6; John 6:1-15]

Happy Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, on this day closest to the Feast of Saints Joachim and Ann! In addition to my reflections, I share with you some thoughts from Sr. Francine-Marie Cooper, ISSM

“Do not cast me off in my old age” (cf. Ps 71:9): This sincere plea, taken from Psalm 71, is the theme of the Fourth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis chose the Theme for the Day, which is organized by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

In his [Message for the Fourth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly](#), Pope Francis reassures them that “God never abandons His children, never.” No matter how old we are, we are still God’s “children!” Pope Francis refers to the elderly as “the firm foundation” on which “new” stones can rest, in order to join in building a spiritual edifice (cf. 1 Peter 2:5).”

“All too often, loneliness is the bleak companion of our lives as elderly persons and grandparents,” Pope Francis writes.

The Holy Father laments that “nowadays many elderly seek personal fulfillment in a life as independent as possible and detached from other people.” Today, people can use delivery services which isolate themselves at home and never have to leave it, except to go to church or to doctor appointments. “The passage from ‘us’ to ‘me’ is one of the most evident signs of our times. Solitude and abandonment have become recurrent elements in today’s social landscape,” the Pope continues.

The Holy Father’s Message concludes with an appeal: “Let us instead show the open heart and the joyful face and find the courage to say ‘I will not abandon you’, and to set out on a different path.”

I have a charming Grandma story to share with you.

The pastor of a parish with a school had his weekly all-school Mass in honor of Earth Day. He asked the students from Kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade what the planet needs more of for people to survive.



The smarter 8<sup>th</sup> graders said clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. The middle grade students said food, clothing and shelter.

Then a little kindergarten student raised her hand and said, 'ME!' The pastor asked her, "Why does the planet need more of you?" The little one answered, "Because whenever I visit my Grandma, when we say good-bye she says, "I can never get enough of you!" Grandparents, say this to YOUR grandkids this week!

Today's little obscure reading from the Second Book of Kings shows that Elisha is one busy guy. He, like Jesus, works wonders for the poor. He purifies a spring of water; he supplies oil to a widow; he gives a son to a barren woman, and then raises that son to life years later when he dies; he even purifies a pot of poisoned stew. Today, he feeds 100 people with a small amount of barley bread, a foreshadowing of today's Gospel.

Elisha is also very active on the political scene as well. He provides water for an army of men; he warns the king of enemy plans and offers military advice.

His intent is not to be seen as a miracle-worker, but to lure a sinful monarchy back to God's sovereignty over Israel and over the whole world.

Jesus knows the feeling of relief when the hungry are fed. Anyone who has served in a soup kitchen sees sad, uncomfortable and even ashamed people holding empty plates. Then they see a transformation take place. The plates, now brimming with food, don't hold only food; they also carry a sense of renewed hope for another day. They see faces that say, "Someone cares. Someone cares enough to feed me."

How much more does Jesus Christ Himself care for us! It is no accident that John puts specific details in his Gospel, details which are not found in the other three Gospels. He puts this "sign" smack dab in the middle of his "seven signs" or miracles.

You and I are nourished. But we are not called to sit passively and rest in our comfort and pleasure.

Get this: You and I are the "fragments" left over from the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. The terms to "gather up" and

“fragments” in the original Greek will be repeated in the oldest preaching of the early Christian Church, the Didache, the “Teachings.” It’s the Didache that gave us the add-on tag to the Lord’s Prayer: “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours. Now and forever. Amen.

With Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life, a great gathering of the human family will take place when Jesus Christ is broken and “fragmented” on the Cross, and at every Mass. Then, nourished by His Body and Blood every time we gather around the table of the Eucharist, we become His hands and feet, His eyes and ears, His heart and soul in a Church and a world that is very, very hungry indeed. That was one of the many themes two weeks ago at the 10th National Eucharistic Congress. We don’t just stay in church – we go out and tell others of the awesome treasure we possess in Jesus Christ. I hope to share more insights with you from the Congress over the next several weeks.

That’s where today’s reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians comes in. It’s the end of the letter, and as usual, Paul makes the final point of the letter his hope, his dream and his heartfelt prayers for the infant Church. This is what he says:

Abused people are hungry for that kind of gentleness which only you can provide. Feed them with your gentleness. There are those whose bodies and spirits are giving in to the hunger of illness, disease and old age. They need to be nourished with the food of your patience. Feed them with your patience. Those who feel unloved, unvalued and unwanted need to be fed with the great love you have kept hidden in your heart. Feed them with your love. Those who seek to divide and conquer need to know and experience the peace that only you can bring. Feed them with your peace. If you don’t have it, pray for it. Make the Prayer of St. Francis come alive in your heart and in your life.

Paul’s ultimate hope, dream and prayer is that everyone who calls themselves “Christian” will be united in one body, one Spirit, one call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism. “One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

This week, you will encounter someone who is begging for your spiritual or

physical help. It's real and it's desperate. Multiply that encounter by hundreds, by thousands, by millions. Jesus Christ CAN do signs and miracles in our day and age! He has US! Will you help Him "do signs and miracles?" The power is in your hands! AMEN!

A BLESSING FOR GRANDPARENTS  
(Used at the Final Blessing at Mass)

Loving God, bless these grandparents who are cherished members of our society and families.

They bring gifts of wisdom, experience and love and share with us their life of faith.

We thank you for their example and for their persistence and perseverance in overcoming difficulties which they encounter.

Bless them with long life, happiness and health. May they remain constant in your love and be living signs of your presence to their children and grandchildren.

Deepen their faith and be their constant hope as they strive to do your will each day.

May Saints Joachim and Anne (the grandparents of Jesus) intercede for them and may Almighty God bless you, + the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.