

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

4th of July History & Trivia: Did You Know... The major objection to being ruled by Britain was taxation without representation. The colonists had no say in the decisions of the English Parliament.

Independence Day was first celebrated in Philadelphia on July 8, 1776. The Liberty Bell sounded from the tower of Independence Hall on July 8, 1776, summoning citizens to gather for the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence by Colonel John Nixon.

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress, looking to promote national pride and unity, adopted the national flag. "Resolved: that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

The first public Fourth of July event at the White House occurred in 1801. Before cars ruled the roadway, the Fourth of July was traditionally the most miserable day of the year for horses, tormented by all the noise and by the boys and girls who threw firecrackers at them. That was on June 24, 1826. The 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence did not sign at the same time, nor did they sign it on July 4, 1776. The official event occurred on August 2, 1776, when 50 men signed it. The names of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were withheld from the public for more than six months to protect the signers. If independence had not been achieved, the treasonable act of the signers would have, by law, resulted in their deaths.

The origin of Uncle Sam probably began in 1812, when Samuel Wilson was a meat packer who provided meat to the US Army. The meat shipments were stamped with the initials, U.S. Someone joked that the initials stood for “Uncle Sam.” This joke eventually led to the idea of Uncle Sam symbolizing the United States government.

In 1941, Congress declared 4th of July a federal legal holiday. It is one of the few federal holidays that have not been moved to the nearest Friday or Monday.

And now, some patriotic quotes from famous patriots, care of the Reader’s Digest:

11. “Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.”  
—*Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

12. “Intellectually, I know that America is no better than any other country; emotionally, I know she is better than every other country.”  
—*Sinclair Lewis*

13. “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” —*John F. Kennedy*

14. “This will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.” —*Elmer Davis*

15. “When you’re born, you get a ticket to the freak show. When you’re born in America, you get a front row seat.” —*George Carlin*

17. “Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” —*George Bernard Shaw*

25. “I believe in America because we have great dreams, and because we have the opportunity to make those dreams come true.”  
—*Wendell L. Willkie*

26. “Dreams are the foundation of America.” —*Lupita Nyong’o*

27. "America is known as a country that welcomes people to its shores. All kinds of people." —[Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#)
28. "This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in." —*Theodore Roosevelt*
32. "The most fatal thing a man can do is try to stand alone." —*Carson McCullers*
33. "The vigor of government is essential to the security of liberty." —*Alexander Hamilton*
34. "All great change in America begins at the dinner table." —*Ronald Reagan*
35. "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." —*Nelson Mandela*
38. "My definition of a free society is a society where it is safe to be unpopular." —*Adlai Stevenson II*
40. "We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others." —[Will Rogers](#)
42. "Because equal rights, fair play, justice, are all like the air: We all have it, or none of us has it. That is the truth of it." —*Maya Angelou*
43. "Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on." —*Thurgood Marshall*
44. "With freedom comes responsibility." —*Eleanor Roosevelt*
55. "There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured with what is right in America." —*Bill Clinton*
56. "Freedom is the oxygen of the soul." —*Moshe Dayan* AMEN!

[Readings: Is. 66:10-14c; Ps. 66; Gal 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20]

I love seeing babies at church. Thank you to the parents who bring them to worship with us. I know it takes a lot of work getting ready at home to come to church. And a lot of work watching over the baby during Mass. How can you not pay attention to a newborn -- yawning, scrunching her little nose up, or trying to jam a fist into his mouth?

And when they're a bit older it's fun to watch them look around from their perch in Mom or Dad's arms, taking in the lights and colors and strange people, making noise in our acoustically perfect space, their eyes wide with curiosity.

My favorites are the ones who are totally collapsed onto their parent's shoulder so we get to see their sweet sleeping face so full of contentment. As the parents walk their children around the back of church or up to Communion or sway to the music while still in the pews, the child's every need is met and the little one is content and satisfied and living in the "now."

In fact, the First Reading this week from Isaiah proclaims a promise from God that those who are faithful will be comforted, fed, carried in God's arms, and filled with joy so that we can collapse, like contented newborns, into God's care.

I have a friend who was born on the Fourth of July. He loves all the parades and fireworks and barbecues. Part of me thinks he really believes that the entire Independence Day holiday was set up to honor him. I can relate.

I was ordained on May 1, 1982, and I thought the Russians put on a big parade just for me in Red Square! I also thought that's why the Church gave us the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker on the same day! On this Independence Day weekend, we are full of patriotic pride. But we have to distinguish between true patriotism and what is called nationalism.

There are times that we as a country feel we have been set apart as a special nation blessed in a special way by God. We have to be careful about this kind of attitude because it can lead to an arrogance and a feeling that we can do no wrong. That's nationalism.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: A citizen must love their country, be sincerely interested in its welfare, and respect and obey its lawful authority. So it comes down to love, interest, respect and obeying LAWFUL authority. That's true patriotism.

The Catechism goes on to say that a citizen shows interest in their country's welfare by voting honestly and without selfish motives, by paying just taxes, and by defending their country's rights. We must respect and obey the lawful authority of our country because that authority comes from God, the source of all authority.

Finally, the Catechism says that we are obliged to take an active part in works of good citizenship because right reason requires citizens to work together for the public welfare of the country. The public good is another way to call it.

With the current political situation in our country, we indeed are being sent by Jesus like lambs among wolves.

The question really should be: What do we Americans do with our abundant blessings? Isaiah tells Jerusalem to rejoice over her

blessings. But later, the responsibility of prosperity means remaining faithful to God. Too often Jerusalem and God's chosen people fail at this task set before them.

It's easy to listen to those who tell us how wonderful we are. But when we are challenged to then do God's work, the task of being faithful to God becomes more difficult. The message is more profound. It's not easy to hear or to respond to. We need to celebrate the challenge as well as the blessing of what God has given us by being here at the right place and at the right time.

Pope Leo XIV said this about international diplomacy: "Resisting all forms of indifference, it appeals to consciences ... ever attentive to the cry of the poor, the needy and the marginalized, as well as to contemporary challenges, ranging from the protection of creation to artificial intelligence."

Yes, I love watching babies, and after hearing Isaiah describe God's promises, I now know that it's a flesh-and-blood meditation on God's total love for each and every person – even you and me.

Do you trust that God's loving care is all you need? Are you willing to rely so totally on God?

The call to be a good Christian and a good Catholic is consistent with being a good American citizen. Let us pray to truly identify ourselves and work to become "one nation, under God."

AMEN!

[Readings: Gen. 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Col. 1:24-28; Lk. 10:38-42]

Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem. As he makes his way, he's being tested; he's also teaching. How does one inherit eternal life? Who is my neighbor? These are some of the questions people keep throwing at Jesus — not out of genuine interest but, as Luke says, “to test him” (Lk 10:25). What these questions are really getting at, therefore, is Jesus himself. Do I believe him? Is he truly the Christ? Should I accept him? If he is the Christ, then how should I accept him?

That is the question underneath this famous passage about Martha and Mary: How does one accept Jesus? Jesus enters Martha's home, and so naturally she busies herself to welcome the prophet. Suddenly, as one would expect, Martha is “burdened with much serving.” But there, too, is Mary, Martha's sister. She's not busy or burdened with much of anything. She just sits at the Lord's feet and listens to him speak (cf. Lk 10:38-40).

What happens next we all know: Martha gets bent out of shape and complains to Jesus about her sister. She's doing all the work! Mary's doing nothing! On the surface, Martha's got a point. We've all been there. We know how she feels. That's why it's so jarring to hear Jesus basically get on her. “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. ... Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her” (Lk 10:42). Why does he say this? Why doesn't Jesus show a bit more empathy? Why does he take Mary's side?

Because she welcomes Jesus with nothing other than openness and faith. Mary does only that thing Jesus has asked his followers to do all along: She listens to him. Mary receives Jesus with simple adoring regard, with the powerless faith God asks of all who receive him. We needn't work to receive Christ; we must simply be still, listen and adore. “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:11). This is precisely what Mary does. That's why Jesus calls it the “better part.” Because that's the best way to receive Jesus — as gentle, contemplative, forgiven adorers.

But, of course, there's another way to look at it, perhaps more common. I've always associated this other way of reading the Martha and Mary story with the Cistercians, but one comes across it everywhere. St. Aelred of Rievaulx, for

example, once said to his monks, “never separate these two women. . . . Do not neglect Martha for Mary, nor Mary for Martha.” St. Aelred interpreted it significant that Christ came to both women, that he entered the one house of Mary and Martha. For him, and other Cistercians, it pointed to a truth about the spiritual life: Sometimes we’ll be contemplatives like Mary and other times workers like Martha. And that’s OK, for Christ came to both women. Undoubtedly, contemplation is the “better part.” To give one’s attention only to God is better. But sometimes the world of Martha beckons us; and when it does, we must commit to good works. Sometimes we simply must be like Martha.

The spiritual balance between Mary and Martha, St. Bernard of Clairvaux called *alternatio*. “Set apart some portion of your heart and your time for consideration,” St. Bernard taught. Really, that is the best we can do this side of heaven: We must be people who do not forget to pray, to meditate, to adore, to receive. We must not forget to be like Mary. We can’t always be Martha. In this life, necessarily, we’ll have to alternate betwixt the two. So, ask yourself: Where do I fit into all this? Christ has indeed come to us. Christ indeed desires to enter your house. So, how will you receive him? What part of you is Mary? What part is Martha? Reflect on that, but also don’t worry too much about it. Because Jesus loves you always. He still comes.

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Our readings this weekend focus on the live, active and transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation History, especially through the ministry of hospitality. In our First Reading, what is Abraham’s reaction when God appears as three strangers? Does Abraham prostrate himself at their feet and remain in an attitude of perpetual adoration? Does he beg for wise teaching or seek moral instruction about certain matters?

No, he springs into extreme hospitality. He is banging pots and pans for quite a while before he exchanges one word with his special company. And this would have been in keeping with the Jewish moral code, which placed hospitality as the highest response to others in need. St. Paul calls this “unknowingly ministering to angels.” St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta calls it “serving God in the



distressed disguise of the poor.” Jesus calls it being Good Samaritans, as we heard in last Sunday’s Gospel.

Abraham’s wife, Sarah, is no longer confined to her tent in the role of a domestic. Like Martha in today’s Gospel, she comes into the presence of the three guests with flour on her hands certainly, but deals with them directly. None of this should be happening. None of this was allowed to happen in the culture of that time. OR in the time of Jesus with Martha and Mary. But the Holy Spirit is doing live, active and transforming work in the history of our salvation.

True hospitality seeks out the needs of the guests and tries to meet them as best as possible. How hospitable are we to each other when we enter this dwelling and encounter each other? Sometimes the only Bible people encounter is the Bible you present to them!

*When have you welcomed the presence of God in an unexpected way?*

One of my favorite stories about Dorothy Day was the time she was being interviewed by a young reporter at a Catholic Worker House. A similar story has been attributed to a saintly Cardinal Archbishop in South America Dom Helder Camara and to Blessed Solanus Casey. It seemed that every few minutes into the interview the doorbell would ring.

Dorothy would politely excuse herself and tend to the one in need. After a number of such interruptions, the reporter became frustrated and wondered out loud why it didn’t seem to bother Dorothy. She was as calm and serene as ever. She smiled at him and told him that every time the doorbell rang it was an opportunity for her to serve Jesus, and what could be more important than that?

*How do you respond to the interruptions in your day and in your life?*

I got into theological trouble with a Pentecostal friend of mine when today’s Second Reading came up: “In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church.” She thought I was implying that the redeeming suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross was somehow imperfect, and lacking in something. Far from it!

His sacrifice was once and for all, total, complete and fulfilling the Father’s will. That is what we re-present every time we celebrate Mass. Nothing about

that is imperfect! But what IS imperfect is when we fail to unite the sufferings you and I are going through right now, with that perfect suffering of Christ. This passage from Saint Paul reminds us that the crosses in our lives are not meaningless. If we use our cross to unite ourselves with Christ Crucified, our suffering is transformed into an act of love for God. The Holy Spirit is doing live, active and transforming work in the history of our salvation.

*How do you find the strength and energy to face your challenges?*

It has been a very difficult few weeks for our country and for some countries around the world. The ongoing wars, terrorist attacks, the multiple attacks and killings by disoriented men, the dozens of attacks on our pro-life facilities. The whole world without God turning upside down.

When you and I share in these sufferings, and in the domestic and demonic sufferings of abuse, bullying and worse, we fill up what is still empty in the sufferings of Christ, who sees, who listens, who stands by us, and who weeps with us. And who, as a good Minister of Hospitality, gives us a message of hope in His Word and who feeds us with His Very Self. AMEN!

[Readings: Gen. 18:20-32; Ps.138; Col. 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-3]

The importance of today's First Reading isn't about the haggling. Although it seems there wasn't even five righteous people there. It's about justice. Should just people die in a fiery blaze because of the sins of others? And what WAS that sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? Sodom and Gomorrah were cities of notorious sin. They did not offer hospitality to the stranger. They abused their sexuality, and, at the same time, they worshiped other gods. They did not trust fully in God's power. God seeks to destroy this nation and unleash the divine justice they so rightly deserve. One Scripture scholar suggests that the real sin here is people pointing out the sins of others and overlooking their own. Look at Abraham himself. He was the first Jewish patriarch, venerated by the three major world religions – Jewish, Christian and Muslim. But he had multiple wives, committed adultery and often lied to cover his tracks.

Perhaps this First Reading should make us aware that each one of us comes before God as a sinner. While God would have every right to condemn us with His divine justice, God offers mercy to the repentant. This reading invites us to focus on our own sin, on our own developing sense of compassion, and the offer of mercy by God to all the waiting world.

A young man on a retreat once told this story of prayer: "I was so angry at God because I had asked and asked him to help me stop doing drugs. And then before long I was getting high again.

"I was angry at God and I was angry at my parents who told me that God would help me if I asked. And I was angry at my Catholic

school teachers who taught me the same thing. I was especially angry one Sunday when I went back to church after a long time and the preacher said that we should be persistent in prayer and not give up. But I wanted to give up. I could no longer trust God after being seemingly turned down, or worse, ignored, so many times before. And yet a few days later, after another terrible night acting in ways that left me shamed and empty and aching, I got down on my knees one more time. I uttered just two words: 'God, help!'

He continued: "And I felt something. It was an inner click of willingness. Something inside shifted, and trust was born inside me. It only took that moment, and my recovery began. And now I'm glad for every prayer I said along the way. It took all that praying not to change God, but to change me."

This doesn't mean that every trouble or sorrow will be erased by God. After all, the One Who taught us the Our Father knew the fullness of suffering on the cross. He took upon Himself everything that men and women could throw at Him. And yet, He trusted amid this sorrow that the Father would act. The Father would act because God never forgets the righteous!

All of us run the risk of being frozen in our present lives by our past sinful actions.

Even when we get the chance to start over, the memory of those actions and the personality they expose stop us in our tracks. And we become dead again.

I heard a homily years ago about the expression "forgive and forget." We have heard and maybe said that expression before, right? "Forgive and forget." I remember a priest saying one time that

if we do not forget, we have not truly forgiven. I do not agree with that opinion.

Now that I am on medication and am reaching that age when forgetting is becoming quite regular, here is what I believe is the true difference between the two.

Forgetting is the cessation of memory, the stopping of remembering. But it may also mean the cessation or the stopping of affection. The offense has been so great, my heart becomes cold and stony toward you or toward myself.

Forgiving is the healing of memories. They are still there, but they will no longer have power or control over me. Forgiving can renew affection. The relationship may be different from this point on, but I permit myself to feel for you or for myself once again. Finally, forgiving keeps something in mind that I need to remember but to keep it in its proper place.

So it is possible to forgive and remember, but also possible to move on.

Luke's Gospel has a different wording of the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, than Matthew has in his version. Matthew's version says, "Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us." Luke says – did you notice it here? – "forgive us our sins FOR WE OURSELVES forgive everyone in debt to us." Jesus teaches us in both versions that there is a connection between the way we forgive ourselves and others and the way God forgives us.

When have you been surprised by the extent that God extends mercy to you, choosing to forgive you and welcoming you back to the fold?

In today's Gospel, Jesus not only shows us how to pray, He encourages persistence. Can you think of a time when your own persistence in prayer has yielded benefits? What keeps you from being persistent in asking for what you truly need?

Luke seems to believe that God first forgives us; then, because of God's generosity, we're prompted to forgive ourselves and others. The difference here it seems is that God, who cannot be outdone in mercy, can forgive even if we do not. It might be good for us to ask what prompts God to be so generous to us.

There can be only one answer: God must value each of us very highly. At the funeral of baseball great Stan Musial, one of his grandsons said, "My grandfather always made nobodies feel like somebodies." God does the same to us. Let us do the same for ourselves and for each other. AMEN!