

This weekend, we celebrate the 4th of July. It is a time filled with picnics fireworks and the company of family and friends. But what is it that the 4th of July actually commemorates? Is it just a show of patriotism? No. It recalls to our memory the signing of the Declaration of Independence on that date in 1776.

It was a remarkable document, because up-to-that-point in history, no other document ever established a country on these principles: **“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.”**

The uniqueness of the statement is that, according to the thoughts on government and politics in place at that time, we were **not** all created equal. We did **not** all share the same rights.

To anyone reading the Declaration in 1776, these rights would have been anything BUT self-evident.

But what made these rights so obvious to the signers was the connection of we who are created and the Creator. It is something our nation would do well to remember.

This document, along with the Bill of Rights flew in the face of conventional wisdom and certainly in the face of an Empire like that of Great Britain! It was a bold, provocative document that gave the world its first taste of a nation destined to be one of the greatest ever established in history. If you haven't read it for awhile, it is well worth taking it up.

Today's readings are also provocative and even somewhat radical. Our first reading, from the 66th chapter of Isaiah, speaks of the hope of an exiled Israel and their return to Jerusalem.... a city forever linked with their national identity. It is truly one of the most poetic and joyful statements in the Old Testament. It expresses the longing of a people for freedom from their captors. It too is worth reading again, on our own.

Our responsorial psalm is resplendent with praise for our God and His fulfillment of His promises. Our Gospel speaks of the Kingdom of God that

is fulfilled in Christ. It reminds us that we, like the seventy-two disciples are to carry on the healing ministry and the defeat of evil in His name and by His power.

But it is the second reading that is most shocking. Paul says to the Galatians **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”**

To a first century hearer, these words would have seemed scandalous.

Crucifixion was the most severe, shameful death anyone could experience. If you knew someone subjected to it, you wouldn't even mention it, let alone glory in it!

Yet Paul tells us that it is the only thing in which he would boast.

Why?

Because He has been made free from the corruption of the world, not by any action of his own, but by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And he continues with another statement: **“For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation.”**

To know how radical a statement that is, we need to remember that circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with His people Israel. It was every bit as important to them, to their national and ethnic pride, as was Jerusalem or the Temple.

In this one sentence, Paul expresses the release from the bondage of the Law, of nationalistic pride, of ethnic superiority in favor of this “new creation”. It was a Christian Declaration of Independence and a reminder that the Kingdom of God, that Jesus and the Twelve and the seventy-two, and every person set apart by Christ has ever preached, is now reigning on Earth.

My brothers and sisters, when we were Baptized, we became a “new creation” in Christ. We have a citizenship greater than that of any nation, for our names are written in Heaven.

We have a liberty greater than that which can be given by any king, any nation, any law, for we have our freedom in this same Christ. It is a unique freedom in that it is true and unfettered. It pledges our allegiance to no man or country, but to God alone. It does not depend on its protection by armies, but stands forever by God’s divine will.

And if there was ever a call for a celebration, ever a reason for fireworks... this is it.