

HOMILY - 14th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - YEAR C
July 4, 2004

Today we celebrate the founding of this great nation 228 years ago and the immense gifts God and our ancestors have given to us. It is a day for patriotism, a virtue recognized in all nations. Patriotism is recognized as a virtue by almost all people, but is much more rarely understood. As with so many other areas, both the famous and the anonymous figures in Scripture can help us to understand aspects of our lives.

In particular, the Scriptures read today present us with both the well-known figure of Isaiah and the generally unnamed seventy-two disciples whom Jesus sent forth to preach the gospel to all the towns of the Chosen People. Isaiah was true patriot of Israel, for he saw in his nation the great and glorious destiny that God had set forth for her; and strained by word and action to make her such a nation able to fulfill it. There are, as G.K. Chesterton points out, two sorts of people who fall short of true patriotism. One sort of person simply does not care about his land and therefore does not involve himself in her progress or concerns. Another sort so much wants his people to succeed that he says, "My country right or wrong." He wants only that his people prosper, not that they deserve to prosper. As Chesterton points out, to say, "My country right or wrong" is like saying, "My family drunk or sober." Someone who truly loves another person, or a nation, will love them despite their faults, but will not seek to justify their faults, or worse yet encourage them. Isaiah was a real patriot, for he deeply loved his nation, and was critical in encouraging King Ahaz to resist the temptation to despair in the face of invasions from the north and from Assyria. He desired that his nation have the glory and independence that God wished for her. But, precisely because he loved his nation so much, he would not simply sit by idly and let such vices as idolatry, impurity, and injustice run rampant. He was very willing to condemn such vices in the strongest terms, and against much opposition, and he warned the people of Judah that continuation in them would draw down upon them the wrath of God. He dedicated his life to making his country the country that God wished her to be, a country fit to welcome the Messiah into the world.

And, when Christ came into the world, He brought His people's history to fulfillment, the beginning place of the kingdom of God on earth. He had a love for all the world, but He also had a special love for His own people. He devoutly came to the Temple every year, despite the increasing dangers it presented. When He foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, He wept over that city. Even after the people of that city crucified Him, He told the apostles to wait there for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, giving one more honor to His people's capital. And we hear today of Jesus sending forth seventy-two of His disciples to all the towns and villages of His land to announce to them the fulfillment of the promises God had made, the great glory that they were to welcome into the world. But both Jesus and the disciples also loved their nation too much simply to let vices continue, to let God's Chosen People wallow in such things as impurity, injustice, and worldliness. And so they would take on these influences and receive opposition and persecution as determined lambs set forth in the midst of wolves who did not want their comfort disturbed. Some towns would accept their word and others not. But those first disciples would be faithful to their mission to make as much of their country come into the kingdom of God as possible.

Likewise, in all lands, Christ and the grace and light of faith He brings makes each nation

shines forth more brilliantly and become a people who will appear with confidence before the throne of God at the end of all things, when as the book of Revelations says, the nations will walk by the light of the Lamb. As St. Justin the Martyr pointed out in his first letter to the emperor around 160 A.D., there were no better Romans than the persecuted Christians, for they lived out the justice and order that Rome always strived for. There were no greater Irish patriots than St. Patrick and his monks, who brought that nation out of the darkness into the light of God. There were no better English patriots than St. Augustine of Canterbury and his monks who brought the faith to that land, and faith that would unite it for more than a millinium, and St. Thomas More, who defended the rule of law, when all others were fawning over King Henry VIII and praising his vices and who said, "I am the king's good servant, but God's first."

And in this nation, those of us who discern and adhere to the law of God, who affirm that all nations will be brought before the throne of God to receive their praise or condemnation by the Son of Man, we can indeed be the most patriotic of all. It is popular these days to try to banish the faith from public life, based upon the so-called "separation of church and state," a phrase found nowhere in America's founding documents. Such an effort would have been surprising to the signers of the Declaration of Independence, who justified their actions not by popularity or feelings, but by reference to the "laws of nature and nature's God" and by the rights and responsibilities given to us by God and who furthermore concluded by entrusting their efforts to Divine Providence. It would have been a surprise to Abraham Lincoln, who said in his second Inaugural Address that slavery was eliminated, (in defiance of the Supreme Court) because it was the will of God. It would have been surprising to George Washington said in his farewell address "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensible supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

And yet, in an effort to promote the worship of wealth, convenience, and pleasure on demand, that is exactly what is done by a host of decadent entertainers who pervert their talents and serve the devil by polluting minds, by barbarians in judges' robes who have abandoned the path of justice and instead set themselves up as virtual dictators forcing upon the public a culture of death that slaughters unborn and partially born children and a culture of decadence that has no respect for the family, for innocence, or even for the American flag, and by spineless politicians who refuse to oppose these forces, but instead encourage the public only to seek one benefit after another from the government, with little concern for true progress in the things that last, such as holiness, courage, and virtue.

We celebrate this day a revolution that occurred two and a quarter centuries ago. But there is another revolution that started two thousand years ago, and will continue until the end of time. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two to prepare the way for this revolution against sin, darkness, and death, a revolution that He would lead from the Cross. And we too, who love our country too much to allow the serpents and scorpions of decadence, worldliness, dishonor and death to prevail, we too are sent forth by the Son of Man to make this nation worthy of the gifts God have given her and worthy to be restored again by Christ in the company of the angels and saints in the everlasting kingdom.