

Independence Day 2025 (Morning Prayer)

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Deuteronomy 10.17-21 St. Matthew 5.43-48



Independence Day means different things to different people. It is celebrated in cities and towns across the Nation with parades, fireworks displays, patriotic songs, speeches, backyard barbecues, family gatherings and religious services. For many people it is a time of reflection and remembering those who fought and died for the freedom we often take for granted.

With the end of the Revolutionary War, Anglicans in the United States needed a Prayer Book that reflected its indebtedness to the English Church and the American ideals of religious freedom and liberty. Bishop William White, the second Anglican Bishop consecrated for the American Church, was the Rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, for 57 years. That must be something of a record. George and Martha Washington were two of his most-famous parishioners.

Bishop White argued for a Prayer Book that avoided partisan politics. He had supported the Revolution, but he did not want to see the Prayer Book used as a tool against clergy and people who had not supported the Revolution. Many clergy who had supported the Crown remained in the United States. They took seriously their commitment to take care of the sheep. It wasn't until our 1928 Revision that the Liturgical observance of Independence Day made its way into the Prayer Book with the lessons we read today.

The Collects for our Government officials in Morning and Evening Prayer, remind us we must always pray for our Government leaders. Our friend, Saint Peter, tells us in his First Letter we are to first give God the reverence and honor due to him and him alone, and show respect for our Government leaders God has placed in a position of authority to maintain order, which is his will.

We can also thank Bishop White and others for giving us the system we use in the Anglican Catholic Church for electing bishops. Bishop White wanted to see bishops in the American Church elected by clergy and lay persons alike. This wasn't so much a reflection of American ideals of Democracy as it was a return to the system used in the early Church. When we elect a bishop in the Anglican Catholic Church, both clergy and lay delegates take part in the election.

The world today isn't much different than it was during Bishop White's time. We are more technologically advanced and live in an age of instant communication. Nations still go to war and poverty and hunger are still global problems. Bishop White wanted to bring peace to the Church and the new United States of America.

The Collects for Peace and Grace said at Morning Prayer teach us true peace can only happen we we let God's Grace reorient our hearts to doing good. The Lesson from Deuteronomy was intended to remind the people they had a responsibility to take care of widows and orphans, and to love strangers, because they too were strangers in Egypt. We are stranger in a strange land called Earth. We look forward to taking our place in our true home in heaven. In the meantime, we need to pay attention to the Lesson from Deuteronomy and apply it to our lives.

There was a common saying at the time, we should love our friends and hate our enemies. In the Second Lesson from the Sermon of the Mount in Matthew, Jesus counters this false teaching by saying we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, because that's the way God's children are supposed to act. Bishop White would have understood this means we must forgive those who have hurt us. He also would have known it is far easier for one person to forgive another person, than it is for nations to forgive other nations.

For most Americans religious freedom means the absence of interference by the Government in the life of the Church. I didn't have to submit this sermon to a Government official for approval; none of us had our drivers licenses checked or our photos taken as we arrived the church today. We continue to do what we started here 47 years ago, provide a place where Catholic Christianity could be expressed through traditional Anglican worship and through sound Biblical teaching and preaching. What brings us here today is our love of God and our Anglican heritage, and our desire to share what we have with others.

In his Letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul writes that our true freedom and liberty comes from knowing God our Father as Jesus Christ has revealed him to us. Jesus is the one who has set us free from sin and death. That's the message we want to get out to others. Let us ask God to give us us his Grace to preserve and help us use the freedom and liberty we enjoy and do the right things. And let us always pray for peace in the Church and the World.

