

The 4th of July and Freedom

This week our nation celebrates the 4th of July, the anniversary when the Delegates of the Continental Congress of the American Colonies formally ratified the Declaration of Independence.

The American War of Independence had been going on for over a year and this bold act of our founding fathers transformed a conflict against tyranny into the first revolution fought, not over power, but over an *idea* – the idea of freedom and self-governance; an idea to which these men relied on “the protection of Divine Providence” and to which [they] pledged “[their] lives, [their] fortunes and [their] sacred honor.” We celebrate their boldness this day and we find the symbol of the freedom they fought for in the flag.

Many of us are familiar with some of the signers of the Declaration: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. John Hancock signed his name the largest so that King George could read it without his spectacles. Charles Carroll, of Maryland, whose brother John was later appointed the Archbishop of Baltimore, was instrumental in drumming up Catholic support for the revolution and for independence.

Others, perhaps not so well

known, did not fare as well. Of the New York delegation Francis Lewis saw his home destroyed; his wife captured and brutally abused by the British. Phillips Livingstone lost all of his vast holdings and died in 1778 still working for the cause of freedom. Louis Morris was barred from his family for seven years. John Martin of Pennsylvania, returned to his intensely loyalist town and was ostracized by his neighbors and some of his relatives. John Hart, of New Jersey lost his wife during the Revolution and died a broken man in 1779. Finally, Thomas Nelson became a commander of the Virginia military during the siege of Yorktown and it is said that he, himself, fired on his own house because British General Cornwallis had made his headquarters.



As Catholics, we too celebrate freedom, a freedom from sin and death won by the bold gesture of Christ’s sacrifice. The symbol of that freedom is the Cross, and like our founding fathers, that *idea* of freedom was preached and lived by num-

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erous men and women who likewise pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. To name a few: St. Peter, in the face of crucifixion, found freedom in Christ to declare he was unworthy to die the same death as his master, whereupon he was crucified upside-down. St. Paul gave up a career as a highly educated Pharisee to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles, only to be beheaded. St. Ignatius of Antioch, eager to die bravely for Christ, is said to have struck the lions in the face when they hesitated to eat him. St. Lawrence was truly free when he (it is said) presented to his Roman persecutors the treasures of the Church in the form of the poor and marginalized. He was roasted alive on a grid-iron, during which he is said to have taunted his executioners with the comment – “turn me over, I am done on this side.”



Down the centuries, our predecessors in the faith provide further example of freedom in Christ. St. Francis of Assisi gave up his wealth and the relationship with his father to find freedom in a relationship with his God. St. Francis Xavier gave up his home and his seven Jesuit companions to bring the Gospel of freedom to the Far East. St. Maximillian Kolbe freely stepped forward to die in the place of a married man

in the Nazi camp of Auschwitz. Mother Theresa of Calcutta freely gave up her own comfort to bring Christ to the poorest of the poor.

As we celebrate our freedom in the Declaration of Independence let us also remember where we get our freedom in the truest sense of the word – the salvation and freedom from sin won for us by Christ. As we wave our flag in honor of the country, let us also look to the Cross – the ultimate symbol of our freedom as Catholic Christians. As we remember the bravery of

our founding fathers and those who have died for our freedom, let us pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor to the cause of our faith and the freedom of the Cross. As we celebrate our nation's independence and pray

for its prosperity, let us also pray that God will forgive our country its sins – against the unborn, the marginalized – and that it may grow more and more in its efforts to bring true justice and freedom, and serve as an example of both throughout the world.

Fr. William Nicholas
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