



Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 7, 2013 C

GOD BLESS AMERICA

This past Thursday, we celebrated our independence as a nation. It is so easy to take our cherished freedoms for granted. To help us appreciate them more, all we have to do is think about all the people who are denied the freedoms we enjoy so much.

America has been rightfully called the “land of opportunity.” So many people have come here penniless from other countries and worked hard to achieve the American Dream. I strongly believe that if I had chosen to remain in Ireland as a priest, I would not have developed my gifts and talents nearly to the extent that I have been able to do in this great land of opportunity. I love the diversity of this country, so well expressed by Herman Melville:

*America has been settled by people of all nations.
All nations may claim her for their own. We are not
a narrow tribe of men.... No, our blood is as the
flood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble
currents all pouring into one.... We are not a nation
so much as a world.*

(If you have a favorite *short* piece about America, please share with me.)

A Fourth of July Prayer

*We lift up our hearts, O God, on this day of celebration
in gratitude for the gift of being Americans.*

*We rejoice with all those who share
in the great dream of freedom and dignity for all.*

*With flags and feasting, with family and friends,
we salute those who have sacrificed*

*that we might have the opportunity
to bring to fulfillment our many God-given gifts.*

*As we deny all prejudice a place in our hearts,
may we also clearly declare our intention*

*to work for the time when all people,
regardless of race, religion or sex,
will be granted equal dignity and worth.*

Come, O gracious God,

*who led your children Israel from slavery,
keep us free from all that might hold us in bondage.*

*Bless our country and join our simple celebration
that we may praise you, our Source of freedom,
the One in whom we place our trust.*

A Pilgrim's Almanac

A FEMALE IMAGE OF GOD

Being a divine mystery, God is beyond definition. All that we can do is use images and metaphors to speak of God. Rather than *saying*: God *is* a rock, a father or a mother or a shepherd, we say that God *is like* a rock, *like* a father or mother or shepherd. The metaphor points to a property of the rock, father, mother or shepherd which is true of God. Metaphors or images have the power to invite us to draw from our rich experience of these created realities the vividness (color and shape) we need to form our image of God. Without metaphors and images, we could speak of God only in abstract terms. However, there is the *danger* that we forget that they are *only* metaphors and images. God is always much more than anything we can imagine.

With that introduction, let us look at today's first reading in which both Jerusalem and God are personified as a mother. Of Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah encourages his hearers to “*suck fully of the milk of her comfort, to nurse with delight at her abundant breasts.*” Later, the prophet speaks of God saying, “*As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you.*” Isaiah is telling us that God is *like* a mother who brings comfort to her children. So it is appropriate for us to imagine and think of God as a mother, just as it is all right for us to envision God as a father or shepherd. Imaging God as a caring mother may be especially healing and helpful for any of us who has or had a poor relationship with our father. We say to a child, “God is your father,” to which the child replies, “my daddy beats me up,” or “he never calls me,” or “he ran away from home.” It would be most difficult for such a child to develop a positive image of God as a father. It may be much easier for him/her to relate to God as a mother.

The truth is that God has no gender. He is neither male nor female, man nor woman. Neither one is superior to the other. Both are equally limited and equally helpful. Rather, we can say that God is *like* both. While the Church as well as most of us will continue to speak of God in masculine ways, hopefully, we can respect those who choose to think and speak and pray to God in female terms.

Tossing aside a sacred cow

Circumcision was of utmost importance to the Jewish

people. Both Jesus and Paul were circumcised. Circumcision was to the Jew what baptism is to us. It was a ritual of initiation into a community. Conservative Jews who became Christians believed that Gentiles should be circumcised before they were allowed to become Christians.

In today's second reading, Paul says that circumcision is totally unimportant to him. Such a statement would have sent shockwaves through his fellow Jews, even the Jews who had become Christians.

After Vatican II, some sacred cows were removed from our Church, e.g., Latin. There was a time when Latin was regarded as a sacred language. Some believed using it was a source of grace. It is always important for us to distinguish *Tradition* with a big "T" from *tradition* with a small "t." The former refers to the core elements of our faith, e.g., Creed, Seven Sacraments, etc., which cannot be changed. We may grow in our understanding of them but no council can change our core beliefs.

Tradition with a small "t" refers to customs and rituals on *how* we do things—for example, *how* we celebrate Eucharist (in Latin or in the vernacular; with the priest facing us or with his back to the people), or *how* we celebrate reconciliation (face-to-face or anonymously). Other examples of tradition with a small "t" are celibacy and abstinence during Fridays in Lent. Small "t" traditions can be changed.

Traveling light - more is never enough

In today's Gospel, Jesus sends out his disciples on their first missionary journey. He tells them to travel light—no suitcases (or golf bags!). Wow! For sure, only a few, if any, of us will fully comply to such an instruction. Hopefully, Jesus' exhortation is not totally lost on us. We can let it challenge the more-is-better mentality that is so prevalent in today's society.

When billionaire Howard Hughes was asked how much money he needed to make him happy, he answered: "a little more." People who make phenomenal incomes, like athletes and CEOs, hold out for more. We have become accustomed to all things "jumbo" like our supersized foods, houses, cars, wardrobe, etc. It seems more is never enough; more just doesn't satisfy.

Spiritual writer, Mary Jo Leddy, maintains that much of our current dissatisfaction comes from the consumer culture in which we live.

She says: "Most of us remain relatively naïve about the extent to which each person's psyche and spirit are shaped by the dynamics of consumerism. We cannot become psychologically healthy and spiritually whole if we keep on shopping in a mindless way."

She goes on to say that consumerism ultimately destroys our soul. In order to consume more, we must produce more even if we destroy ourselves in the process. "The message is you must have more to be more. And more. You must have more to be happy."

Consumerism is not limited to bigger cars and homes and trips and material things. It invades our escalating need for more security, more beauty, more power, more experiences, more time, more leisure and, ultimately, more spirituality to handle it all.

In the book, "Simple Abundance," the author offers a vivid picture of a life driven by deadlines and demands, with which we can identify.

She recommends that we learn to distinguish wants from needs, that we live simply and liberate ourselves from the culture of greed by being grateful for the abundance we already enjoy.

Like the seventy-two whom Jesus appointed, all of us here today have the responsibility of bringing the message of simple abundance to a world driven by over-the-top consumerism.

Certainly our addictive culture and materialism are powerful influences but ultimately we must look within ourselves to discover a solution.

Perhaps it is our lack of faith in ourselves and in the abundance of a loving God that drives us to bolster ourselves up from the outside with more of what we didn't need in the first place. All of us are on a journey toward our final destination. In order to make our journey more pleasurable and fulfilling, we suggest the following: Create a space to enjoy your abundance; give away those things you no longer need; share your money with others less fortunate; cut back on your TV viewing; stop worrying about your finances; shop less and give more; eat only what you need; spend time alone with God; sit quietly with a friend; play with a child; say thank you; express your love; read the words of mercy; and do something for somebody else.

The list could go on but let us begin at least for a few moments today to let go of our compulsive need for more, and rest fully satisfied with things as they are—like a baby at its mother's breast or a creature confident in the arms of a loving God.

Finally, a quote from Mother Teresa:

"Live simply so that others may simply live."

Hoping you are having a wonderful 4th of July weekend.

