Homily for Independence Day – July 4

Today we gather to thank God for the gift of our nation and for the many blessings we enjoy as citizens of the United States. Independence Day is a day of celebration, but for Christians, it is also a day of reflection. Patriotism is not simply waving a flag or watching fireworks. True patriotism begins with gratitude, grows through responsibility, and is perfected in love.

Our country was founded on the conviction that every human person is endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights. Notice that those rights do not come from government. They come from God. Human dignity is not granted by laws or courts. It is given by our Creator. That is why the Church tirelessly defends the dignity of every human life.

The greatest freedom, however, is not political freedom. The greatest freedom is the freedom Christ won for us.

Many people think freedom means doing whatever I want. But we all know from experience that this kind of freedom can become another form of slavery. A person can be free to choose and still become enslaved to anger, addiction, greed, pride, or fear. Jesus came to set us free from the chains that bind the human heart.

As St. Paul writes, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free."*** Christian freedom is not the freedom to do anything; it is the freedom to do what is right, what is good, and what leads us to God. We are truly free when we live according to the purpose for which God created us.

The Gospel reminds us that the Kingdom of God begins not with power but with conversion. Our nation will never be stronger than the moral character of its people. Laws are important, but laws alone cannot create justice. Elections matter, but elections alone cannot create peace. Prosperity is valuable, but wealth alone cannot create happiness.

Strong families, honest citizens, faithful believers, generous neighbors—these are the true foundation of any great nation.

As Catholics, we are called to be both faithful Christians and responsible citizens. We pray for our leaders, whether we voted for them or not. We participate in public life with charity and respect. We defend truth without hatred. We disagree without becoming enemies. We seek the common good rather than our own interests.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing our country today is division. We live in a time when people often see one another first through politics instead of humanity. Social media, news, and public debate can easily turn neighbors into opponents.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to be peacemakers. That does not mean ignoring the truth. It means speaking the truth with love. It means refusing to let bitterness take root in our hearts. It means remembering that every person—even someone with whom we strongly disagree—is made in the image of God.

Today we should also remember with gratitude those who sacrificed so much for our freedom: the Founding Fathers who envisioned this nation;

generations of immigrants who built it; the men and women who have served in our armed forces; police officers, firefighters, first responders, teachers, healthcare workers, and all who continue to serve the common good. Freedom has always carried a price, and countless Americans have paid that price with courage and sacrifice.

Yet even as we celebrate our nation's blessings, we recognize that no earthly nation is perfect. Every country needs God's mercy. Every generation must renew its commitment to justice, truth, and compassion. Patriotism does not mean pretending our country has no faults. It means loving our country enough to help it become better.

The saints remind us that while we are citizens of the United States, we are first citizens of Heaven. Our ultimate allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ. Every earthly kingdom will one day pass away, but God's Kingdom is eternal.

So, today let us thank God for our freedoms. Let us pray for our nation, for wisdom among our leaders, for unity among our people, for protection of the vulnerable, and for peace throughout the world.

May God continue to bless the United States of America—not simply with prosperity or power, but with holiness, justice, compassion, and faith. And may each of us, by living the Gospel every day, help make our nation a place where freedom is guided by truth, justice is tempered with mercy, and every human life is respected as a sacred gift from God. **Amen.**