

July 6, 2010



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Greetings to all who are blessed in the Freedom of Christ,

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 33:12, ***“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord...”***

The celebrations continue! Happy Birthday, America! As you celebrated Independence Day, I hope it was a safe and wonderful opportunity to remember all the sacrifice and cost associated with our freedom as citizens of this great Nation.

I love the Fourth of July because it’s such a great reminder of the true value and worth for which all that this great nation stands. Despite the poor economy and the difficulties we face, this is still one of the most blessed nations on the earth—one nation, under God. Yet how quickly we could lose it all if we turn our backs on God! All we need to do is look at the state of the Church in Europe to get an indication of what could happen right here.

I was amazed when I was in Italy several years ago at how beautiful the churches were. The sad thing was that in most cases they were pretty much reduced to museums. This nation was founded upon the principles of freedom, among them religious freedom. It wasn’t so easily attained. There was a cost involved. Many people sacrificed and gave up much to secure the freedoms we enjoy, including one that Americans seem to have all but given away—the freedom to worship God. Years ago Paul Harvey told the following story about the cost of our freedom.

Americans, you know the 56 men who signed our Declaration of Independence that first 4th of July--you know they were risking everything, don’t you? Because if they won the war with the British, there would be years of hardship as a struggling nation. If they lost they would face a hangman’s noose. And yet there where it says, "We herewith pledge, our lives, our fortunes, and



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our sacred honor," they did sign. But did you know that they paid the price?

When Carter Braxton of Virginia signed the Declaration of Independence, he was a wealthy planter and trader. But thereafter he saw his ships swept from the seas and to pay his debts, he lost his home and all of his property. He died in rags.

Thomas Lynch, Jr., who signed that pledge, was a third generation rice grower and aristocrat--a large plantation owner--but after he signed his health failed. With his wife he set out for France to regain his failing health. Their ship never got to France; he was never heard from again.

Thomas McKean of Delaware was so harassed by the enemy that he was forced to move his family five times in five months. He served in Congress without pay, his family in poverty and in hiding.

Vandals looted the properties of Ellery and Clymer and Hall and Gwinett and Walton and Heyward and Rutledge and Middleton. Thomas Nelson, Jr. of Virginia raised two million dollars on his own signature to provision our allies, the French fleet. After the War he personally paid back the loans wiping out his entire estate; he was never reimbursed by his government. In the final battle for Yorktown, he, Nelson, urged General Washington to fire on his, Nelson's own home, then occupied by Cornwallis. And he died bankrupt. Thomas Nelson, Jr. had pledged his life, his fortune, and his sacred honor.

The Hessians seized the home of Francis Hopkinson of New Jersey. Francis Lewis had his home and everything destroyed, his wife imprisoned--she died within a few months. Richard Stockton, who signed the Declaration of Independence, pledging his life and his fortune, was captured and mistreated, and his health broken to the extent that he died at 51. And his estate was pillaged.

Thomas Heyward, Jr. was captured when Charleston fell. John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside while she was dying; their thirteen children fled in all directions for their lives. His fields and gristmill were laid waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves and returned home after the War to find his wife dead, his children gone, and his properties gone. He died a few weeks later of exhaustion and a broken heart.

Lewis Morris saw his land destroyed, his family scattered. Philip Livingston died within a few months of hardships of the War.

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John Hancock, history remembers best, due to a quirk of fate--that great sweeping signature attesting to his vanity, towers over the others. One of the wealthiest men in New England, he stood outside Boston one terrible night of the War and said, "Burn Boston, though it makes John Hancock a beggar, if the public good requires it." He, too, lived up to the pledge.

Of the 56 signers of the Declaration, few were long to survive. Five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes--from Rhode Island to Charleston--sacked and looted, occupied by the enemy or burned. Two of them lost their sons in the Army; one had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 died in the War from its hardships or from its more merciful bullets.

I don't know what impression you'd had of these men who met that hot summer in Philadelphia, but I think it's important this July 4, that we remember this about them: they were not poor men, they were not wild-eyed pirates. These were men of means; these were rich men, most of them, who enjoyed much ease and luxury in personal living. Not hungry men—but prosperous men, wealthy land owners, substantially secure in their prosperity.

But they considered liberty--this is as much I shall say of it--they had learned that liberty is so much more important than security, that they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. And they fulfilled their pledge--they paid the price, and freedom was born. We are beneficiaries of that freedom still today, but nobody knows for how long!

In the face of what often seems like fleeting freedom, we have a deeper, more sure security of freedom. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Galatians 5:1,13-14 ESV

As Christians we have an even greater, perfect freedom that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. While the world fights the freedom of our Christian faith, lashing out in fear and anger, the security of that freedom doesn't rest on governments or upon politicians. That freedom was made absolute and certain at the Cross of Jesus. His death and resurrection mark for us a freedom unlike the world knows. Yet, so often we forfeit that freedom.

Use that freedom during this month to pray for our military men and women, and especially those who serve them as chaplains. We have several in our own District, including Graham Glover, James Watson, Mark Logid, and Gary Williams. These are men who have made sacrifices, in some cases leaving their families behind as they serve near the front lines. These men are making meaningful sacrifices to exercise their freedom in Jesus and to serve others. We are so grateful for all who serve in our armed forces to maintain our civil freedom, as well as our way of life in America! Pray for these men and all our soldiers!

As we remember the freedom we have in Christ, may it encourage us and spur us on to serve one another, and the world in the stead and in the love of Jesus. As we share that love with the world, we experience an even deeper level of freedom that we could imagine, and we open the door to a new found freedom for those we serve as well. We have such great freedom in Jesus. Don't neglect or ignore it. Live in it, and experience the joy of our life in Him.

In a few days many who are called delegates to the Synodical Convention will have a practical opportunity to not only experience the freedom that is ours in Jesus, but also to serve one another in His love. Do keep this in prayer as the Synod in Convention, which begins Saturday, July 10 and runs through Saturday, July 17 makes decisions that impact the future of our beloved Synod, including who will lead it forward, how we will interact with an unbelieving world, and even how we will interact with fellow believers. All of these are important matters, and I ask you to please pray for these matters.

Live in the freedom of Jesus, brothers and sisters! And let His love shine through you as you serve one another in His love!

Greg

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