

Dear Friends,

When I was growing up, I had a fascination with the flag of the United States. There was something about the stars & stripes that intrigued me and made me proud of my country. There are some flags around the world that are more elaborately decorated with symbols appropriate for their history and heritage. The flag of the United States, on the other hand, is simply made up of 50 stars on a blue field and alternating red and white stripes. Despite its simplicity, it evokes strong feelings of patriotism, tremendous pride and a profound love for freedom. As we celebrate this Independence Day, I can't help but be reminded of the meaning that lies behind those stars and stripes.

I am reminded of the great price that has been paid by so many courageous men and women who have served our country throughout its brief history. I am reminded of the courage it took to lay down the guiding principles for a free republic, the likes of which had never been seen before. I am reminded of the benefits that I have inherited as a result of the vision of our forefathers.

While I am enthralled with the countries and cultures of my immigrant ancestry, I am exceedingly proud that I am American. I enjoy getting to know other cultures and learning other languages. I appreciate the diversity of foods from around the world and have even eaten things I cannot identify. I love to travel to foreign lands and I cannot imagine a world without the myriad of cultural experiences. But I have often considered how fortunate I am to have been born here in the USA. This weekend is a good time for us all to count our blessings of liberty and the opportunities we have to worship our God freely.

What a blessing it is that we can worship our God as Catholics. Just as we might consider how fortunate it is to share in the freedoms of this country, we should thank God for the even greater privilege that it is to be a Catholic. The fact that we can call ourselves Christian is due to the great courage, sacrifice, and perseverance of those who have gone before us in faith. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two to preach the Good News to neighboring towns and villages. Believers in Christ have done this ever since. Many died doing so.

As citizens of God's kingdom, let us pass on what we have received to our children, grandchildren, neighbors, and friends. Just as our nation's freedoms are not automatically handed down, neither is our Faith. It has to be proclaimed, preserved and safeguarded by each individual and generation in much the same way that we strive to perpetuate our nation's independence. Let us not neglect our task. Let us each be diligent in passing on our Faith. There may be a cost, but the cost is worth it! God bless!

Fr. Paul