



July 3, 2022

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Galatians 6:14



Dear Friends,

Across the street from the parish house is an over-the-top patriotic display. There must be at least twenty-five American flags. There is a sign in gigantic letters proclaiming, "Proud to be American. ARE YOU?" As the United States celebrates Independence Day, we revel in our founding myths. How good it is to be the chosen ones!

Early colonial preachers liked to compare the establishment of what would become the USA to the bible and the establishment of Israel. They imagined themselves as a new chosen people escaping not Egypt but the tyranny of monarchies and slavery to worn out European plutocracies. And they created an alternative experience in establishing this country with the idea that "we were conceived in liberty" and that "all are created equal."

Looking back, we realize that those ideals also were flawed in the execution, as happens with so many human endeavors. The dream of equality originally applied only to land owning white males. Being a new Israel was corrupted from the beginning. Instead of fleeing slavery, early settlers brought, bought, and traded slaves. Native peoples were treated with contempt and in the way of the colonists seizing indigenous territory.

While Israel had their moments of high nationalism and pride, they never forgot that it was those very moments that led to Israel's downfall and destruction. The difference between us and ancient Israel is how we tell our story. The USA tells its story as heroic victory and manifest destiny. We think that God is on our side when we win anything from sporting events to wars.

Israel told its story not as a triumphant tale but a story of sin and conversion that led to a deeper love of God. During the Civil War there was a reception at the White House. A woman was conversing with President Lincoln. She said, "*Mr. President, I am so sure that God is on our side.*" Mr. Lincoln replied, "*I am not concerned if God is on our side, but I am concerned that we are on God's side.*"

On this July 4th weekend St Paul gives us the antidote to arrogance and nationalism. He says, "*May I never boast of anything but the cross.*" We forget that before the cross became a religious symbol it was a symbol of shame. It was a punishment reserved only for the worst members of society—rebellious slaves, revolutionaries, and those who undermined the moral order. This was the fate of Jesus—not glorious but shameful. But because of his innocence and trust in God, God raised him up to a new status—a humanity transformed by forgiveness and love. It is vulnerability not power that saves.

When Jesus sends the 72 disciples out on mission, he commands them to bring no money, no luggage, nor shoes. These things are symbols of culture. We must meet others in our vulnerability not in displays of ego. The message of love can't just be preached but must be lived. Missionaries must learn from those on whose generosity they depend. We as disciples are called to witness to peacemaking, solidarity, and justice for the marginalized. This is where the cross comes in; we face a society filled with violence, radical individualism, and the private privilege of the elite. That makes being chosen not a matter of bragging but a dangerous lifestyle.

On this holiday weekend we give thanks for our nation. But let us also have the humility to realize that like our forebears we have our flaws. America and the Gospel are not the same. The Gospel is countercultural. We live in "the most powerful nation on earth" but that has nothing to do with gentle, persuasive power of divine love. We are called despite our flaws. Sometimes we will knock Satan down, other times we will fall. Like Lincoln, let us be concerned that we are on the side of God rather than thinking that he is on ours.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church