

“SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC”

Readings: Psalm 67

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

IT'S A RARE occurrence, but once every blue moon the Fourth of July falls on a Sunday. That's precisely where we find ourselves today, so I suppose an "Independence Day" sermon is in order. Although we don't plan to set off any fireworks, I do want to reiterate that you are all invited to join Mark Watkins in the Parker Room after today's service to share a cup of lemonade and participate in the singing of some patriotic songs.

Truth to tell, these have not been easy times for the red, white, and blue lately. Mired in a stubborn recession, bogged down in two seemingly intractable wars, and beset by a series of catastrophes—both natural and manmade—things have not gone too smoothly for our country during the first decade of the twenty-first century. As a result anger and frustration abound. Democrats are blaming Republicans, Republicans are blaming Democrats, and the Tea Party people are blaming both the Republicans and the Democrats.

Anger can be a good starting point but it makes a poor finishing point. It's going to take more than anger to get this country up and moving. It's going to take vision, cooperation, sacrifice, compassion, hope and courage, not to mention smarts. In other words, the same kind of characteristics exhibited by our forbears who founded this country two hundred and thirty-four years ago.

While it's true that some of our problems have been visited upon us from abroad (i.e. 9/11), and some of them have been visited upon us by nature (i.e. Katrina), the fact is we have no one to blame for most of our difficulties but ourselves (i.e. the economic meltdown, Gulf Coast oil spill, etc...). Nevertheless, all these factors have combined to create a kind of national *malaise*; a feeling that

our problems may be too big for us to solve and that perhaps our nation's "better days" are now behind us.

This isn't the first time Americans have felt this way of course. Disillusioned by the events of the First World War and its aftermath, the poet Robinson Jeffers wrote,

While this America settles in the mold
of its vulgarity, heavily thickening
to empire,

And protest, only a babble in the
molten mass, pops and sighs out, and
mass hardens,

I sadly smiling remember that the
flower fades to make fruit, the
fruit rots to make earth.

Out of the mother; and through the
spring exultances, ripeness and
decadence; and home to the mother.

You making haste haste on decay, not
blameworthy; life is good, be it
stubbornly long or suddenly
A mortal splendor; meteors are not

needed less than mountains: shine

perishing republic.

But for my children, I would have them

keep their distance from the

thickening center; corruption

Never has been compulsory, when the

cities lie at the monster's feet

there are left no mountains.

It seems to me that if our country wants to see the Mountains once again, and become more than a meteor streaking across the sky of history, we have to recommit ourselves to the things that made this country great in the first place—a belief that all people are created equal; commitment to the common good; love of freedom; and a willingness to extend a helping hand to those who need it.

The worst thing we can do is bemoan our situation and continue to blame others. The last thing we need to do around here is to start scapegoating others; especially the stranger, the poor, and the immigrant. After all, they are not the ones who handed out the sub-primes loans that scuttled the housing market and shot the country's economy all to hell (as Berthold Brecht once put it, "What's robbing a bank compared to owning one?").

America's true greatness lies not in its military power, its abundant wealth, or its vast storehouse of natural resources. Rather, it lies in our inexhaustible ability to recreate ourselves; to critique ourselves; and to use our freedom as a springboard to strike off in new directions.

In many ways the situation of our country today is not unlike that of the church. Both seem unable or unwilling to move forward and confront the new

world that's out there. Both seem more tied to the past than they are to the future. Both seem unable or unwilling to do the things that need to be done in order to move the institution forward.

But also like the church it's always easier to point out our nation's flaws rather than celebrate its strengths. And the truth is this country, despite all its challenges, still has a lot of strengths and great deal to celebrate. Yes, we're going through a difficult time right now, but we have been through difficult times before and come out stronger for it. As Saint Paul put it in this morning's Epistle lesson, we are "perplexed, but not driven to despair; struck down, but not destroyed."

What we celebrate today is freedom and "freedom," as Albert Camus once pointed out, "is nothing but the chance to be better." I believe that this country can be better and I believe our better days are still ahead of us. So shine, perishing republic, and let the light of your freedom continue to shine as a light to all the nations!

"America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea."

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