

## 070410 THE FOURTH

(What follows is an Examination of Conscience based on significant documents of our country and the readings for this Sunday.)

### From The Declaration of Independence

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these I are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

### From The New Colossus by Emma Lazarus (at the base of the Statue of Liberty)

Not like the giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch,  
Whose flame is the imprisoned lightning,  
And her name Mother of Exiles.  
From her beacon-hand glows world-wide welcome;  
Her mild eyes command  
the air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
“Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!”  
cries she with silent lips.  
“Give me your tired, your poor,  
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

“All” men are created equal. Not just Americans. All men. And not just all “men.” Men and women. And not just Caucasian men and women. Men and women of all colors, races, languages and ethnicities are created equal—called to be free.

And not just the well-off or the settled or the reliable or the hardworking and dependable but those who have nothing or almost nothing except their dreams. For there are still today the tired and the poor and huddled masses yearning to breathe free on this planet.

Our country and our Catholic faith are allies in this quest. How are we doing? Are we still on the path of becoming the greatest country in the world? Do you sense that some of our core values have begun to shift just a bit? Have the Great Recession and all that led up to it and the ongoing oil gushing at the sea floor of the Gulf of

Mexico sapped our national confidence? Rendered us more tentative? Prompted us to make decisions that we have not fully thought through? Or make choices because we are afraid rather than because of what we are convinced of? Is your soul, American and catholic, still set on fairness, on freedom (“liberty and justice for all” as we say when we pledge our allegiance to the flag?), welcoming others here because our ancestors were welcomed here before us?

There is no question in my mind that as a country and as citizens we have been greatly blessed. But these very blessings for which we give thanks have given me pause for thought. I have to question myself because as the blessings have increased have I grown more grateful and more generous or have I grown more desirous and more acquisitive not so much sharing as amassing? Have I allowed my head to be turned from looking out for others to looking out for myself, for me and mine? Have I begun to develop an attitude of entitlement without even realizing it? I am entitled to—a home, a good job, two good jobs, the best for my kids, nursing care for my elders, healthcare for me and my loved ones? These are not bad things. My examination is whether I have begun to believe that I am entitled to them rather than appreciative of and accepting of them knowing that for most of the people in the world these things do not exist for them.

I ask myself: Have I forgotten what Jesus says to his disciples when He sends them out in the gospel for today? He reminds them that they don’t really need much. They don’t need the sack, the wallet or purse, the rugged and reliable footwear. They have him and they have his peace. These are the things on which they—and we—are to rely. Depend on me, the Lord says. Ask yourself as part of this Independence Day Examination of Conscience, if this is what you are doing, how you are living your life? Is this what you are observing in your fellow parishioners and fellow citizens all around you?

Ask yourself if you think that some of what is happening in our country and to our country is being allowed to happen to get our attention? I do. And the Lord is starting to get my attention. I believe he wants us to be praying more not less. I believe that this is the time for making more sacrifices rather than hunkering down and increasing our personal resources. I believe that the Lord is asking us right now to become more generous with what we have rather than less generous with what we have. I believe the Lord is asking us to do a better job of recognizing the cross in our lives and a better job of accepting that cross rather than fleeing it or trying to go around it. I believe the Lord wants to hear a little more apology from us for what we have done and what we have failed to do and a little less rationalization for our actions or our inaction. I believe that He wants us to turn over our anxieties and our fears and our worries to him right now and trust him and live in hope despite what things look like.

Later today and this weekend there will be burgers and beer and barbecues, fireworks and patriotic music. All that is good and appropriate but we are called to

more. To bear the cross. To travel light. To opt for less rather than for more. To trust more than we do. To be on the lookout for those in need all around us and move to be of help. My friends, something is stirring in the world of the Spirit. I can feel it. Perhaps you can to or have begun to. Soon we will each have to choose how we will continue to live. This is not a time for business as usual. For, as Jesus said, the kingdom of God is at hand.