

Homily for Sunday, July 6, 2008

### Introduction

On this 4th of July weekend we have heard, as always, much rhetoric about the foundations of our country - the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in particular. And it is a good thing to remember these documents and the reality which surrounded them. We have much for which to be grateful as we celebrate another anniversary of our country's birth - our freedom and the many liberties we enjoy.

### I

Nevertheless, my own thoughts during these days have run to another historical moment, one much closer to our own time and one which many of us remember vividly - the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Historian Arthur Schlesinger called that confrontation "the most dangerous moment in human history".

We know the contours of the crisis: a deadly nuclear threat posed by the Soviet Union a mere 90 miles from our Florida coast; - a standoff between the world's only two superpowers of that time, the Soviet Union and the United States, each of them capable of what was known in those days as "mutually assured destruction".; and in the end the amazing fact that two leaders from opposite sides of the globe, opposite ideological, political and spiritual convictions, John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, backed down from the confrontation, valuing survival over winning, preserving life (like the lives of these two precious babies we shall baptize here today) rather than practicing "oneupmanship" over one another..

### II

It strikes me that we have much to reflect on as a result of this crisis diffused and a sure nuclear exchange avoided. Because we find ourselves today in the quagmire that is Iraq and most recently hearing a drumbeat from this nation's leadership in favor of a military strike against Iran. Both of these initiatives are madness and it's important to remember that with regard to Iraq the Peace Movement got it exactly right when we marched in huge numbers against this adventurism in Iraq. And we still get it right in opposing any military strike against Iran. We've all heard the dictum of George Santayana: "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it". Today our leaders seem to have learned nothing from the experience of our nuclear standoff against the Soviet Union nearly half a century ago.

### III

This past week I heard a quote from Alex Tocqueville, the French observer who travelled this country in the first decades of our national life and who made many observations which have stood the test of time. He warned about "thoughtless democracy" - having the privilege of a democratic process without doing the important work to use it well.

In an information age like ours, this is a legitimate warning and challenge. We know a lot of things but do we know what to do with all of this information? "Thoughtless democracy" has never been as much a possibility, I believe, than today in our country.

#### Conclusion

May these thoughts help us as we move through this latest celebration of America's birthday. May they inspire us to exercise well the VIRTUE of Patriotism.