

Who are we as a people? What are we becoming?

Text of homily by Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM at the 9:30 a.m. Mass at Our Lady Queen of Peace on July 1, 2018.

I. This week we shall experience great excitement, joy, pride in our country's 243rd birthday - Independence Day, the 4th of July. And rightly so. We have been blessed with a gorgeous geography; with a unique democratic system; with access for the most part to civil rights backed by law (1st Amendment for example). Our privileges are many. Not many countries of the world can rival our blessings. So the hoopla, and endless speeches celebrating the United States of America are quite appropriate.

II. However, for people of the Gospel - people who are Christians who happen to be Americans - it seems entirely in order that we make a serious communal examination of conscience. Questions need to be asked by us: Who are we as a people? What are we becoming? Should we continue to call our country "exceptional"? Such an examination may reveal aspects of our national life which require urgent reform.

For this examination of conscience perhaps a useful way would be to start with the foundational document we celebrate each 4th of July - the Declaration of Independence:

- It was written by a slave-owner and signed by 41 other slave owners out of the 55 total signatories.
- Despite slavery in our land at that time, the Declaration affirmed that "all MEN are created equal".
- Women were not mentioned and it took one-hundred and forty-five years before female citizens could vote.
- The document stated the following in its long list of grievances against King George II of England: "He has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian Savages..."
- Despite this founding principle that all men are created equal, the institution/sin of slavery endured officially for 88 years until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863; then a long century of Jim Crow laws, separate schools and public facilities for white and black people. Black military men who fought for our country in the Civil War, the First and Second World wars were not fully integrated into the armed forces until 1948. Some 110,000 to 120,000 American citizens deemed somehow to be inferior or dangerous were interned in concentration camps from 1942 until 1945. Today African-American citizens of the United States continue to be harassed and even killed by law enforcement personnel.

And we are shocked these days to know that immigrant children and their parents have been ripped apart under the euphemism of "Zero Tolerance" and know nothing about each other's whereabouts. Mr

Trump has categorized these refugees as "drug dealers", "criminals", "rapists", "killers", "animals", "vermin", "terrorists".

Just this week the Supreme Court of our land has affirmed the policy of barring immigrants seeking a legal path to live among us - particularly people from majority Muslim countries.

Sisters and brothers, fellow citizens of this country, and followers of Jesus, today's Gospel speaks of the Savior's attention to a woman who had been robbed of her savings by unscrupulous doctors; and he raised a sick little girl from her bed, heals her and tells those standing there "give her something to eat." He is our model, our North Star, as we look back on our history of high ideals mixed with serious cancers. We are Christians who happen to be Americans -- both of those categorizations call for this sort of clear-eyed reflection on who we should be.

In doing this Jesus words will be realized once again: "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free."