



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Independence Day
July 4, 2026
Sr. Belinda Monahan

Isaiah 32:15-20
Psalm 72
Colossians 3:12-15
John 14:23-29

Today as a country, we celebrate the fourth of July—Independence Day; the day on which the members of the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, declaring that the thirteen colonies were no longer subject to the king of England. As I'm sure we're all aware, today marks the 250th anniversary of this event.

I have to admit that, as I prepared these reflections, I found myself at a loss for what to say. The gap between the idyll represented in today's readings, and a celebration of our country, is so wide as to be almost unbridgeable. I suspect I am not alone in wondering how to celebrate a country in which ICE is rounding up and detaining individuals as they go about their daily lives without recourse to due process. A country that has involved itself in an unjust war in the Middle East. A country that has spent millions "remodeling" the White House and the National Mall, while our fellow citizens are hungry, homeless, and without adequate access to healthcare.

And if we're willing to be honest with ourselves, our history—even at its founding—is not necessarily that much better. When the Declaration of Independence claimed that "all men are created equal," they consciously excluded women, enslaved people and their descendants, and Native Americans. While the ideals that our country espoused at the beginning and continues to profess are worth upholding, we seem to consistently fall short of living those values out in a real way.

As I pondered these questions, well aware of the depressing hole I have dug for myself, I found my thoughts returning to the [Leadership Conference of Women Religious Declaration of Commitment](#). I was particularly drawn to the second half of this reflection:

As bearers of hope:

- *We commit ourselves to living compassion, communion, and nonviolence as members of one global community.*
- *We remain steadfast in our belief in the inherent right to life of every human being and the dignity of each person.*
- *We proclaim the urgent necessity of nonviolence in both word and action.*
- *We embrace our responsibility to make choices that support the good of all life on this planet.*
- *We pledge to live our call to be courageous witnesses of love — refusing to surrender our moral authority or succumb to despair.*

These reflections point us past our nation, as flawed as it is, to remind us of our citizenship in the eternal world, in the peaceful country of which our readings speak.

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They do more than state our ideals, they invite us—as individuals and as a community—to do the work that living up to these ideals necessitates. And this is work in which all have a part. We can be courageous witnesses of love in our dining room, as well as in the spaces in which we minister. We can commit ourselves to living compassion with the Sister next to us in chapel, as well as the stranger on the street.

Despite my struggles with these reflections, I think it's important that we DO celebrate this holiday here—at THIS table, as well as our dining table (which we'll do well in a very short while). Because it is at this table that we encounter in a real way, the incarnation of justice and right relationships, and who by giving of himself, gives us the strength and the courage to work toward the same.

Happy fourth of July.