



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Reflections for the 4th of July
July 4, 2024
Sister Belinda Monahan

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

When I spent time with these readings—especially in the context of the Fourth of July holiday that we celebrate today, the obvious theme that ran through them was “peace.” Each of them presents a subtly different idyll, that illuminates a different facet of peace. So I began reflecting on the concept of peace itself—but it went beyond an abstract thinking about peace; I found myself wondering what it means to be at peace and how to achieve peace—as an individual, for and in community, in our nation and even in the world.

All of today’s readings, including the text of the holiday we celebrate, insist that peace is not simply the absence of conflict or war. Isaiah attributes peace to “the spirit from on high” suggesting that peace is a gift. Isaiah, also, relates peace to “The work of justice.” We must work for peace and that work has something to do with building and maintaining right relationship.

That theme of peace as right relationship continues into the letter to the Colossians. Paul describes the unity of the body of Christ as being a characteristic of the peace of Christ. He exhorts those of us who are called into this peace to practice heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We must bear with one another (or as St. Benedict admonishes us in Chapter 72 of the Rule “support one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior”) and forgive one another. Peace suddenly sounds like quite a lot of work.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks to his disciples—and of course to us—of the peace he leaves as he prepares for his death. That peace is enmeshed in Jesus’s relationship with both his Father and the Holy Spirit—in other words peace is an aspect of the Trinity. This reading would seem to involve the least amount of work for peace, except for that pesky line “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” a fine reminder that all of my fretting—no matter how necessary I think it is—leads not toward peace but away from it.

And our final “text” for today, the fourth of July holiday, which commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence. What I probably learned at some point and grammar school and had since forgotten is that the Declaration of Independence was not the start of the Revolutionary War, but was written over a year after the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord.

In the middle of a war, this document represents the founding fathers aspirations for a nation of peace and justice based in what they believed to be self-evident truths—“that all men (by which the founding fathers really meant land-owning white men) are created equal...” that certain

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rights are inalienable, and that governments should be designed in such a way as to safeguard both the equality and the rights.

Such a nation seemed to them worth fighting a war for, as a first step toward a later peace. Whatever the current failings of the United States, our country has taken strides toward recognizing, in our ideals if not always in our practices, the equality of all men and women, regardless of race, religion, or economic status. And while the rights of some—and indeed the functioning of a government which safeguards them, may be beleaguered at the moment, men and women here continue to strive for the right relationships that lead to peace within our nation and across borders.

So these readings and this holiday seem to be calling us to several steps if we are to achieve peace. The first is the recognition that peace must be rooted in the trinity. It isn't something we can acquire or achieve on our own. It is a gift from God.

And like so many gifts from God, we must cooperate and do the work. Peace goes hand in hand with right relationship—with justice, compassion, kindness,, etc. Seeking peace for myself and ignoring the others around me isn't going to lead me anywhere. While we certainly can and should work for peace within ourselves and those around us and it must start there, the beauty and serenity in today's readings will only come about if all of us—be that all Christians or all residents in our nation or even all citizens of the world--are working toward that peace—are striving for it.

Happy fourth of July.