

Rev. Derek Fairman
Special July 4th Homily

This weekend, as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the country, I want to reflect a bit on this country, where we have been, and where we are going. The first reading is about Daughter Zion. This prophecy had to do with Jerusalem, and in a way, the Virgin Mary, that the King would come to Daughter Zion, and that she should rejoice, because the King comes to bring *peace*. The United States is not the Virgin Mary, nor is the United States in any way a fulfillment of a prophecy about Daughter Zion. But there is a reason to rejoice.

The United States has been described in many ways before: a city on a hill, the greatest country ever. I want to describe the United States' role in terms of the Magnificat. The Magnificat is Mary's hymn of praise, in which she recognizes what God has done for her, and not just for her, for those who have come before her, and those who will come after her. The Magnificat is not just Mary's hymn of praise, but the hymn of Daughter Zion, and the whole faithful people.

There is only one Mother of God. We cannot replicate what she has done, and what role she plays in God's plan. Nonetheless, we can imitate her attitude towards God, towards her people, and we can follow her example of gratitude and self-awareness. We can echo her hymn of praise. As we reflect upon the Magnificat, we can imagine her words relating to this country's calling. As each line is read, imagine this Magnificat to be about the country.

The Virgin Mary began, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on his lowly servant." Our own souls, and the soul of this country, can and must proclaim God's greatness, not our own greatness. Rather than puffing ourselves with pride, which many others have done before, and which preceded their downfall, we can recognize that God has given us His blessings. We are lowly, but we have received great things from God. We can find joy in our country but still be grateful; pride only leads to a dark path.

Without putting down other nations, we can recognize that the Lord has blessed us. When the country has sought worldly glory and renown, this has come at the expense of others, both people of other countries, and our own people. Whenever we seek the greatness which comes from God, then everyone is invited to be lifted to greatness. The invitation is offered, although not all accept that invitation, but the Lord does not exalt anyone at the expense of someone else. The Lord brings us together in peace, rather than divides us.

As a country, we are lowly; until the war with Spain was over, the United States was not considered to possess any real power on the world stage. Even later, our expanded role in the world is due to the European powers' collapse. If it were not for divine providence, we could not speak of greatness. Our origins are humble, whether people like to admit it or not.

"From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name." From July 4, 1776, until today, and beyond, the Lord has blessed us. As General Washington and his troops endured the winter at Valley Forge in 1777-1778, that may not have been the thought that was running through their minds. We can look back now and

see that the Lord has blessed the country, but it is because of the perseverance of the founders that we can recognize that blessing.

The Almighty has done great things for our country and for each of us. As we celebrate this 250th birthday of the United States, we recall all the great things that the Lord has done for us, and not only us, but for the whole world through the generosity that this country has employed throughout her history. We pray that other people and nations will look upon this country with benevolence and goodwill.

“He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation; He has shown the strength of His arm, and He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted the lowly.” We might think of the various wars that this country has fought, from the War of Independence until today. There has been no shortage of strong and mighty in the world whose hearts have turned to arrogance and pride. This is why we rejoice on this 250th birthday of the country, and we are grateful. This is why we must be careful against pride, because the Blessed Virgin warns that the Lord scatters the proud in their conceit. This warning is not just for those outside the country, but for those within it.

The United States fulfills this calling when she is faithful to her friends, generous to her allies, and merciful to those enemies who are vanquished. The Virgin Mary mentions mercy to those who fear the Lord. If we are to continue to be blessed, we must be merciful. We must fear the Lord, and we must strive to be holy, to be set apart, to bear the light that the Lord brings us, if the Almighty will continue to do great things for us.

“He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.” We have been blessed in this country with an abundance of food, water to drink, and many other good things. These good things are not meant just for us, but to be shared with other peoples and other nations. Besides gratitude, there is room for generosity. Just as the Mother of God recognized that what God was doing in her life was for everyone, so too we recognize that what God has done is for the sake of all people.

“He has come to the help of His servant Israel, for He has remembered His promise of mercy, the promise He made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever.” We remember those who have gone before us, those who have died for their country, those whose sweat and tears helped to make this country what it is. They could not have accomplished so much, however, without the help that comes from God. Remembering God’s hand in this country’s history takes nothing away from the human element. It paves the way for even greater things to come.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord to continue to bless the United States on its 250th anniversary. We thank the Lord for everything that He has done to ensure that this country, with its humble origins, not only persevered during the darkest days, but grew because of the blessings which the Lord gave. We ask the Lord to continue to do great things for us, and that we may not give into the temptation to pride. We have the Blessed Virgin to help us by her prayers; we seek to imitate her example, and we strive to echo her song.