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## *God Bless America*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Every Fourth of July, I give thanks for the United States of America. I give thanks because I am a loyal citizen of this country, but I also give thanks because I truly believe God loves this country.

Yes, I know there are things wrong with my country, just like I know there are things wrong with my family. But those faults do not prevent me from being proud of my family; and those faults do not prevent me from being proud of my country. I believe God loves this country and wants the best for it!

I am accustomed to giving thanks for two dates in the history of our country. The first, of course, is the Fourth of July itself, the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. That statement set this country forth on a beautiful journey.

The second date is 1789, the date of the completion of our United States Constitution. Among other principles, the Constitution set forth one of the noblest principles of the separation of church and state that this world has ever known. It was an "American experiment," if you will. Could a country exist without forcing religious behavior? It has turned out that we have not only existed, but spirituality has thrived here. The separation of church and state in the United States has actually enabled religion to flourish.

This year, on the birthday of our country, I also give thanks for another date: *April 1865*. I have just read a book titled precisely that: *April 1865*, by Jay Winik. I am not one of those Southerners obsessed with Civil War history and nostalgia, but I must say that Winik's treatment of the heroes of that war—both Northern and Southern—is brilliant. Essentially, Jay Winik makes the point that our country truly became a nation in April of 1865. Until that point, the United States of America referred to thirteen states bonded together in a kind of federal union. After that point, the United States of America was a singular, collective noun; we were one nation. We were still quite divided, but we were one nation.

I believe God honors the union of diverse individuals bonding freely together. The union between two different persons, in marriage, is something God honors. The union of various individuals in communities of faith—churches—is something God honors. The union of fifty states in one nation is something God honors. The ability of so many peace-loving religious entities to express faith and love freely, is something that God honors. God honors our commitments to union and love, even when conflict and disagreements flare up.

The United States allows for, and encourages, all those voluntary associations and voluntary unions. God's love thrives in an atmosphere of free will, honor, and the common good. Thus, it is a great honor to love and to serve this country.

Here in Atlanta, the Fourth of July is marked particularly by the running of the Peachtree Road Race. We all know, by now, that this event is not merely about running a race. A few souls are competing for the win; others are competing against themselves and time. But most runners are there for the grand "parade" of runners itself.

Every year since I arrived at the Cathedral of St. Philip, I have stood at the entrance to our church and blessed that grand parade of Peachtree runners. I have seen all shapes and sizes and opinions and expressions of America on those Independence Days. And I have blessed each of those expressions with holy water. I believe that God blesses each of those

expressions of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, too. When I say, "Blessings! Blessings to you! God bless you!" to those runners, I believe God truly is blessing all of America. Join me this year in blessing America. God bless America, land that I love.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler