
Independence Day: God, Family, and Country

A sermon by Deacon Juan Sandoval
The Sunday after Independence Day – Year C

I'm proud to be an American
where at least I know I'm free
and I won't forget the men who died
who gave that right to me
and I'd gladly stand up next to you
and defend her still today
'cause there ain't no doubt
I love this land
God Bless the USA

What is more American than Mom, apple pie and baseball? I dearly love my Mom. But I LOVE apple pie! And I enjoy the Braves. But I think each of us has his or her own priorities as to what is American. What are yours? For me, it is God, Family and Country. This wonderful holiday celebrating the birth of our great country always conjures images of parades with patriotic John Phillip Souza marches, picnics, and fireworks.

As a young child, I recall getting together with family to celebrate Independence Day. It was a day of pride and joy. Some years we celebrated at homes, other years in parks. I can still smell the grilling of hot dogs, hamburgers, wonderful side dishes, metal tubs filled with ice cold sodas and of course, **Apple Pie**. What a celebration, ending the eve sitting on blankets, hearing the booms and looking up to the sky, seeing the wonderful cascades of color. What could be better than to celebrate our great nation and being with family.

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty - To the many who have fought to maintain our liberty, our freedom, our way of life. It gives me a great sense of pride when we talk about our many heroes. This year was the 75th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy on D-day. I'm sure many of you watched some of the coverage of those who landed on those beaches, those who parachuted into Normandy. Did you have a sense of patriotism when you watched the many interviews? I know I did and my father, he was one of those who parachuted into Normandy on D-day. My father, my hero, a member of the 101st Airborne Division, who participated in this fateful day that changed the course of history and allowed us to continue to have the many freedoms we have today.

The military tradition has been in my family starting with WWII. My namesake, my Uncle Juan Delgado Sandoval was a marine in WWII and was killed in action in the Philippines. Now one of my sons has made a career of serving our country in the Coast Guard for 19 years. I asked him why. This was his reply:

"I've been all over the world. I've seen the good and the bad in those countries along with ours. I get to protect what this country stands for and make sure we continue to prosper. And even with the turmoil that exists within our country, I get to protect the right for people to have different views because that is part of our freedom, even though I may not agree with all the views."

Currently my granddaughter, Kaitlyn, is in ROTC at her high school and hopes to serve this country as well.

"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." (JFK inaugural speech). Not everyone has the opportunity to serve of great nation, but I know we have many here at the Cathedral who have served or are serving and to them, we give thanks.

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all" As I grew, I had an innate feeling of what was right. I was drawn to care for others and enlisted as a medic during the Vietnam conflict. So I can tell you I have seen the pain and suffering endured by those brave men and women who have served our great nation. I always felt God had a plan for me and it started with caring for others. Caring for these wounded was a privilege and an opportunity to serve our soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen, the wounded, the burned and the broken. It was interesting that right across from the Intensive Care Unit where I was assigned, was the hospital chapel. It made it very convenient to go across the hall at the end of a shift and pray for those wounded, the suffering and those who died. God is with us always.

Being a medic made me realize that caring for others was what I loved and had a passion for doing. I left the military and went back to college to earn my bachelors of science in nursing and masters in health care administration. I then re-entered the Army to serve in Army Nurse Corps. I always felt that God was guiding me in this direction and how better to serve others, to serve my country and serve God. I was blessed and am blessed.

Growing up in this country has always given me great hope for what each of us can do within the United States and around the world. This country gives us all opportunities not only to serve our country in some way, but also to serve God and God's people. Having traveled around the world, I know that we are so blessed. Here we have the many ministries within our church and in our communities that make a difference, that raise people up, that assist them in unlocking their potential. And also unlocking our potential by living into our baptismal covenant by loving and serving our neighbors, our family and our God.

Now, God has led me in a different, but similar direction, to serve the wonderful people of the Cathedral of St. Philip. the Diocese of Atlanta, and the people of the world, where ever they might be and whatever they might believe and to whomever they pray or not. I find it uncanny that today's epistle guides us to care for all, I am grateful to not only to care for those in the Episcopal tradition but to serve others of various faiths. I am more blessed than I deserve and I thank God for allowing me to continue to serve God, Country and my family in this way. I love my God, I love my family and I love the red, white and blue, may it wave forever.

Our fathers' God to thee,
Author of liberty,
to thee we sing
long may our land be bright
with freedoms holy light
protect us by thy might
Great God, Our King

AMEN.