

Steeple News

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The Blessings of Freedom

People arriving in the New York harbor by sea are greeted by the majestic Stature of Liberty, her torch raised high in a symbolic salute to freedom. Millions of people have visited that national shrine and are reminded of the freedoms of these United States and the love we have for those freedoms. When Americans say that we love our country, we refer not only to the beauty of the lakes, hills, prairies, mountains, and seas, but the love of an inner light in which freedom lives and which an individual can draw the breath of self-respect.

Living in America is a blessing worth thinking about often. Not just during the national holidays set aside for that purpose. It is a privilege many people throughout the world would be honored to share. This is the only country on earth deliberately created not on the basis of geography, but on behalf of an ideal. The idea was liberty, the right to breathe free. A Constitution was written to guarantee it. Our Declaration of Independence proclaims it. Oddly enough, few Americans now recall that original purpose, and that means that our liberty is too often taken for granted.

The fiber of our nation is strong, but the lessons of history should teach us that freedom is the most easily lost of man's possessions, that apathy is our greatest problem. No nation can endure without the dedication, support, and enthusiasm of its people. We can fight apathy by remembering the blessings and privileges that come with citizenship, by expressing them openly, and by helping our children understand and appreciate these blessings. We should also have a spirit of godliness, for God and the church have always been at the center of activity in America, tying family, community, and nation together.

Ultimately, nations are only as strong as their ideas. When a nation no longer represents an idea, its future is in doubt. Many citizens of our country have affluence and prosperity but show a tendency to attribute those conditions to their own personal achievement. This attitude can produce a wicked pride, a hardness of heart and a false sense of personal self-sufficiency. Do we, as individuals, really have a right to take our comfort, and security for granted when so much of the world lives in anguish, poverty, and fear? I feel that we can't.

The torch of freedom is held high by the Statue of Liberty. Our task is to keep the torch burning to symbolically light the powerful message at the base of the statue. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... send me the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

Rev. Hans Lillejord