

Salute our American heritage with prayer

Through the good graces of Bill and MaryAnn Albaugh I was invited to give the invocation before the Towson Fourth of July Parade. I received a number of requests for that prayer, so I thought I would reprint it, along with some additional commentary.

“O God , we thank you for this moment of celebration. We thank you for our forefathers and mothers who planted a dream and built it into a nation. We thank you for those who believed that we did not need a king or a dictator to tell us how to live, but people who believed that all of us together could decide a better way to live.

“We thank you for those who taught us that the right way to live was not just to look out for number one, but to look out for one another. We thank you for those who taught us that the common good was greater than the individual good, and that all riches are not about what we can hoard for ourselves but what we could share with each other.”

I think we have discovered in the recent economic meltdown that, when we don't look out for others, we really don't look out for ourselves. Excessive greed has led to the breakdown of our economy. Excessive focus on hedonistic pleasure has led to the breakdown of marriages and families. Excessive individualism has led to us forgetting that we are a family, a human family. And, as the signers of the Declaration of Independence knew, if we don't hang together, we will surely hang separately.

My prayer continued: “We thank you, Lord God, not only for those who declared a belief in a new way of life but for all the countless men and women who have given their lives to preserve this way of freedom and justice for all. We thank you for those who gave the last full measure of their love to defeat Nazism and Communism, to halt the progress of terrorists and anarchists. In the sacrifice of their lives, they remind us that we will be the land of the free only as long as we are also the home of the brave.”

In its roots as a persecuted religion, Christianity was also a pacifist religion. However, when it moved from being persecuted by Rome to becoming the official religion of the empire, just war theories began to develop. As I've said before, without external authority, bullies rule our lives. Without police, gangs rule the streets. Without a military, dictators run the world.

My prayer continued: "And, Lord, in this particular moment, and for this particular parade, we give you thanks. We thank you for those who march and perform, for those who play and parade, for those who planned and prepared."

Planning a parade is much like planning a liturgy. No one on the outside could possibly know all the preparation involved. But for each Sunday, there are themes to be chosen, music to be prepared, lectors, servers, cantors, eucharistic ministers to be scheduled, homilies to be written and on and on. Most people just show up for Mass, or for a parade, and things just happen!

I concluded my prayer: "And, finally, O God, may each of us in this country believe that the least among us on this platform and standing on these streets, the least among us lives with greater abundance than 90 percent of all the people who have ever lived on this planet.

"For this moment in time and for all of this abundance, unmerited and unearned, we give thanks to you, our good and gracious God. Amen!"

As a humble working man from Altoona, Pa., the late Edward Kristofco, always said: "We don't know how good we have it."