

**Sermon for JULY 4, 2020 by Sister Linda Clare, CSJB**

**The Declaration of Independence  
Action of the Second Continental Congress, July 4, 1776  
The Unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America:**

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

The Declaration of Independence consists of 5 parts and we have just heard the first, and most of the second, section.

The next is the indictment (listing all the grievances against King George III), the denunciation, and the conclusion followed by the signatures.

For a decade before 1776, relations with Britain had been deteriorating. Acts of rebellion such as the Boston Tea Party and oppressive sanctions combined with heavy taxation by England had led to hard feelings on both sides. Armed conflict broke out in 1775. Before that time, most colonists felt that Parliament had no jurisdiction over them but ironically would have sworn allegiance to the King.

By the time of the second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, there was no ambiguity about how the colonists felt about English rule and how they envisioned their future.

We learned about the Declaration of Independence in our American history classes and new citizens study it as part of the naturalization process. But it is more than an historic document on exhibit in the national archives. It is a living document but sadly the words do not ring true in these times and the life has gone out of it.

Even in 1776, it was not a wholly honest document. Those who drafted and signed it were speaking of other men like themselves - free white men. Not those who were different – minorities, other races, other ethnic backgrounds.

27 grievances are listed against the King but they are not the grievances of the current times. Its lofty sentiments have become tarnished and it is difficult to see their relevance today. Our current news reports remind us of that. We would like to think the Declaration still applies but sadly it does not.

In the aftermath of the Declaration:

John Adams wrote to his wife: that Independence Day will be celebrated by succeeding generations. It ought to be commemorated by solemn acts of devotion to Almighty God. It ought to have pomp and parade, sports, games, bells, and illuminations – from this time forward and forever more.

George Washington read the Declaration to the people of New York City on July 9th and the crowds answered by toppling statues of King George III and other British leaders. We see the echoes of that today.

Abraham Lincoln considered it the backbone of his moral and political philosophy. It became the basis for the Emancipation Proclamation.

There is no way that I can say we honor the opening paragraphs today. We don't suffer under a king or foreign government but there are too many in America who suffer oppression in other ways. By accident of birth, I am not oppressed and I can never put myself in the shoes of those who are. I can never fully embody their history, their past, or their present pain. But a new reality is calling all of us forward. The events of this spring will not fade away or go unanswered. There is too much tangible evidence for that to happen. Too many injustices have been witnessed by too many.

New challenges await us. We are reminded that those challenges require as much faith and courage as those of our ancestors. That we must move into the future with belief and in relationship with a living God who is present with us here and now. A God who walks with us into the unknown – into a future where truly all will be equal.