

Remarks at the Patriotic Service by the Belltower – Sunday, July 5, 2026 – After 11:00am Mass
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L. – 1,035 words

Greetings to all! Thank you for gathering for this brief patriotic service, here by our belltower, which has a fine set of change-ringing bells that were cast by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London a little over 20 years ago – the same foundry that was the first to cast the Liberty Bell, some 273 years ago. We are grateful for this connection between our bells and a great national symbol of liberty, and that connection affords us this brief opportunity now to reflect with gratitude upon the gifts God has given us and our world through the United States of America, as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of its founding.

To focus this reflection, I want to read what we might call the “dispositive part” of the great Declaration of Independence, signed on this day in 1776. Besides representing a pivotal moment in our history, it is also a great monument of English prose, memorized by schoolchildren, studied by jurists, a source of national pride – and a text that I have the honor of reading now:

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 effect 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 has shown, 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. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government.

[...]

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free

and independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

As Divine Providence has willed that we should all be present for this moment of our nation's history – with all its challenges, blessings, hopes, and fears – and to be thankful for the freedoms we possess, so we gather to give thanks today.

The nation's founders did not hesitate to name God and his Providence in this key founding document, proclaiming that the unalienable rights we had came from him. They summarized them as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, and we know, of course, that those rights would be further clarified and enshrined in law in the years following and ever since. One of the greatest of the rights give us by God is freedom of religion, which guarantees that we may worship him according to the dictates of our conscience – and not only in some private way, hidden from everyone else, but in a public way, living out our faith through good works in the public square.

This belltower, which rings joyfully each week, is in its own way a monument to that right. Each week, the sound of bells interrupts the ordinary din of the world with a sound that reminds all of something higher; they cause people to think about Church, about God, about noble things. We renew our gratitude to Fr. Donohoe and the Kidd family, the names of whom are inscribed on this plaque and on the individual bells, for their special gifts that made this tower possible. Among them was Miss Anna Catharine Grace, whose gifts in support of sacred music and have benefitted us and our diocese in numerous ways, including also with the pipe organ that accompanies our worship each week.

And so I will bless this tower again, with its two inscriptions – “Ring out your joy to the Lord” and “Rejoice in the Lord always” – asking God that he may continue to work through these quality bells and the skilled and dedicated people who ring them, to touch the hearts of those who hear and help us all to lift up our hearts to the Lord. After the prayer of blessing and the sprinkling of holy water, I suggest that we sing one verse of “God Bless America”, which I am sure most know by heart – and then the ringers will begin their service of ringing for this Sunday. Thank you to them, thank you to all, and thanks be to God!