

Homily based on the readings from July 4, 2026 (Amos 9.11-15;
Matthew 9.14-17)

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.

Everyone here, regardless of your age or nationality, is certainly familiar with these words – authored by Thomas Jefferson, who died exactly 200 years ago today, and signed by him and 55 other brave patriots from around the country. This text is not only a template for the *American* political experiment – now 250 years in progress – but a roadmap for *all* people intent on safeguarding their God-given freedoms. The fundamental message, which cannot be decoupled from our nation’s Christian heritage, is that our rights and responsibilities are not bestowed by princes, presidents, legislators, or judges – but come directly from God himself. As children of our Heavenly Father, made in his image and likeness, we *all* possess an inherent worth that can never be quantified, restricted, or overturned.

As you may have heard, Pope Leo – our nation’s latest contribution to the worldwide Church – was just awarded the Liberty Medal by the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. His acceptance speech, which he delivered yesterday by livestream from Rome, clearly articulates the universal truths upon which this nation was established:

As a son of this great country, founded by courageous men and women who dreamed of liberty and of a better life for themselves and for their children, I join you in asking God’s blessings upon America’s future, that the lofty ideals enshrined at the beginning of the Declaration of Independence may continue to guide the flourishing of the nation in unity, justice, and peace. ... While couched in the language of the Enlightenment, that claim [to the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness] is ultimately grounded in an understanding of the human person inspired by the great biblical vision of man and woman being created in the divine image. It is indeed *here* that we discover the basis of human

dignity; dignity which *precedes* the establishment of any State, and whose *custody* constitutes its very *purpose*.

Whenever a government forgets, or intentionally rejects, this foundational principle, that is precisely when its citizens must be “Absolved from all Allegiance” to their tyrannical overlords – or, in the words of today’s Gospel, allowed to “pour new wine into fresh wineskins.”

An essential point, which President Jefferson and Pope Leo both understood clearly, is that *life* is the *preeminent* right, without which no other could possibly exist. Our most basic duty, as citizens and as Christians, is to oppose the forces within our society that *perversely* characterize the *destruction* of human life – of unborn children, of the terminally ill, of the elderly – as a work of mercy. To quote Pope Leo once again: “the moral greatness of a nation is manifested, above all, in its capacity to support, protect, and cherish the lives of all, especially the most vulnerable and those whose worth is questioned.”

And so, as we prepare to gather with friends and family to celebrate this momentous anniversary, remember that the remarkable system we have been blessed to inherit – *government of the people, by the people, for the people* – is only as good as the *people* themselves. The best thing we can do for our nation is to embody the virtues we would like it to possess – to embrace *the better angels of our nature*, as the saying goes. With all due respect to our Founding Fathers, people are *rarely* convinced by lofty rhetoric – or even by well-reasoned arguments. What matters, in the end, are the countless acts of kindness, generosity, compassion, and self-sacrifice – which are never recorded by historians, but which fundamentally shape our collective destiny. If we remain steadfast in our faith, *with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence*, then the Eternal Lawgiver will continue to shower this *great and beautiful* nation with his abundant blessings.