

Some of us take these liberties so much for granted, but we shouldn't. So, take a few minutes while enjoying your 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday and silently thank these patriots. It's not much to ask for the price they paid.

Remember: Freedom is never free!

It is a privilege to be an American. It is also a responsibility. We are proud of our country's achievements, of her place in the sun. We revel in her riches, her busy cities, her fruitful farmlands. Nowhere in the world is there so much comfort and convenience, so little suffering, so many generous hearts. Just as we are proud of all these American qualities, so each one of us is bound to do his best to continue these American virtues.

It is customary to bring gifts on a loved one's birthday. We do love our country, don't we? What gifts can we bring her today, our nation's birthday? What gifts are fitting, one might ask? Not money. America has an ample supply of that. Not power. She is the most powerful nation in the world. Not honor. All the nations of the world honor the Stars and Stripes and what they stand for. Not glory. That glory is written on every page of her history.

What gift then can we make to our country? Give her your loyalty, your love, your service. Dedicate yourself to obey the Constitution and laws of the land. Pledge yourself to support our public officials who defend our rights and freedoms. Beloved America, we offer these gifts to you today.

Today we declare our Independence from tyranny. Thank God our forefathers won freedom for us. But we still need to declare ourselves independent of selfishness, independent of unkindness, independent of injustice, independent of the neglect of God, independent of thoughtlessness about the meaning and importance of what took place July 4, 1776.

Millions of those who shoot firecrackers today will give not a moment's thought to the reason. Millions who enjoy the blessings of liberty will not recall that these are gifts of an all-good God.

May we all catch a spark of the spirit displayed by that young lad who courageously declared that he would have signed the Declaration of Independence. He has the spirit we all need today. Though we cannot sign it, we can live in the spirit of that deathless document.

May we all kneel before God this day and thank Him for the privileges of our beloved country. Thank God we enjoy the rights He gave us, rights which we have entrusted to our elected government officials, rights which are denied to millions throughout the world. Tell God that you will try to live worthy of this high privilege of living in a country where His name is honored. Most of all, declare your dependence on Him.

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## Fourth of July

Several years ago in one of our large Eastern states the legislature was about to meet. As usual, the speaker of the house had the task of choosing legislative messengers. These young boys and girls have the job of carrying letters and papers from one desk to another, from one office to another. A dozen young people applied. The speaker asked their names and inquired about their schooling, in order to make the best choice. In the course of his examination, he came to a small fellow about ten years old, rather bright-looking.

"Well, young man," said Mr. Patterson, "what is your name?" "John Hancock," answered the boy.

"John Hancock?" echoed the speaker. "You are not the John Hancock who signed the Declaration of Independence, are you?"

The boy straightened his shoulders and stretched to his full height as he declared:

"No sir, but I would have signed it if I had been there." "You can be one of the messengers," said the speaker.

I wonder how many of us would have signed the Declaration of Independence if we had been there. I wonder how many of us would have had the courage to risk everything we possessed – family, property, and even life itself – in order to be free and independent. I wonder how many of us would have made the sacrifices demanded of those brave men who on July 4, 1776, told the powerful but unjust king of England that they intended to be his subjects no longer.

On July 4, we recall and celebrate the birthday of our beloved country. We honor the men who dared, at the risk of death, to declare that the United States independent of British rule.

The ways in which we celebrate this fact are rather weird. Some will be shooting firecrackers at midnight. Some will be blasting cannon crackers at five in the morning. Such citizens seem to have an idiotic idea of what July 4 means. Yes, we should celebrate this day with picnics and races, outings and golf and what have you. But let us be intelligent about it. Let us be thoughtful, at least for a moment.

Above all we want to recall that the Declaration of Independence is a religious document, in the sense that it was conceived and drawn up by godly men in a godly strain. In the very first sentence, God is mentioned. The second paragraph goes on to speak of God in those words we all learned, or should have learned, in school:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, ... That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Listen also to the concluding sentence:

“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.”

We honor the men who drew up that daring document. We honor the men who signed it. And we honor the men who backed them up on the battlefield, making good their determination to live free or die.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War. They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. What kind of men were they?

Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means,

well educated, but they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags.

Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward. Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr, noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished.