**Dependence or Independence - July 2016 Newsletter**

Each July our thoughts focus on Independence Day. There are celebrations, picnics, fireworks, and sometimes a day off from work. But how often do we remember what the Fourth of July is really about? Without reflection, the day is just another day with a party.

The final sentence of the Declaration of Independence says, ***“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.”***

What commitment! The men that signed that Declaration were willing to risk everything for the freedom and independence that document expresses. Many of those signers did lose everything. Throughout the years since then, many others have given of themselves, many having given their very lives, to maintain that freedom. And we enjoy the benefits.

As important as the Declaration of Independence was, and still is, it’s still an earthly document with no eternal benefits. When our Lord Jesus returns in glory on the Last Day, everything, including that Declaration, will be as nothing. Everything earthly will fade away.

What if we were to apply them to life in the Church, and especially here at St. James? What if we were to strive ***“… 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 have been set free from the oppression of the tyrants of sin, death, and the devil. The battle has been fought and the victory won. Jesus gave His all, shed His Holy precious Blood, died, and rose from the dead that we might be truly free.

That’s why your Baptism is so important. In Baptism you were baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection so you would no longer be a slave to sin. In Baptism, sin no longer has dominion over you. You are no longer under the Law but under God’s grace. In Baptism, Christ has declared your independence from sin and adopted you into His family. As a child of Christ you’re totally dependent on Him for all things pertaining to life and salvation. (Please read Romans 6.)

For those in Christ’s Church, we too have “a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.” God has promised that ***“… everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”*** (Rm 10:13). God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier gives us His abiding care and protection through all the battles and storms of this life. While much of His care happens out of our sight, many of His precious gifts are delivered every Sunday in worship. By means of Word and Sacrament, God creates and nourishes saving faith. In His the forgiveness of sins, breaks the chains of sin that enslave us. Finally, on the Last Day, He promises to deliver us safely into eternal freedom in His Kingdom.

Christ’s church on earth is much more valuable than an earthly government. That’s why we need to constantly make use of His Means of Grace (preaching, Baptism, Absolution, Communion) and thank Him for them. We need to frequently hear Him speak His words of forgiveness and life. We need to hear His Law and His Gospel that we might learn to trust Him more and more and live as His people. We need to receive Christ’s Body and Blood as often as we can for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith. This is our greatest treasure!

St. James is not an independent entity. We are members of the Body of Christ. As members of Christ’s Church, we are totally dependent on our loving God. We have the opportunity to “mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor” as we live under God’s Word and protection. God grant that by His grace we would do everything we can for the maintenance and furtherance of St. James and the saving Gospel of Christ. As we live under God’s grace and protection, and as we enjoy the sacred honor of His holy name, let us give of ourselves and our fortunes so that lifesaving Gospel of Christ Jesus would be proclaimed, now and forever.

God’s Peace is yours! Pastor Sutton