

Sunday Sermon – 2nd Matthew – Elisha & Flag Day – 2015-06-14

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Elisha whom we commemorate today was a prophet of Israel about 800 years before Christ. He was a disciple of Elijah the Prophet. When Elijah knew that God was calling him home, he asked Elisha what he wanted him to do for him. Elisha asked that he receive a double portion of Elijah's grace from God. This was a tall order and a bold request. Elijah said to Elisha, "If you see me when I am taken up to heaven it will be granted to you." Elisha saw Elijah be taken up to heaven in fiery chariot. As Elijah was ascending to heaven, he threw down his mantel, his overcoat. Elisha picked it up and began to do the works Elijah did and even greater works for a longer period of time.

Today is Flag Day in America. On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress adopted the "Stars and Stripes" as our national symbol. On that day two years earlier, it had adopted a resolution to form the US Army. Over that two years, General Washington needed thousands of men to join the army to bring freedom to our land. Though there were local and state celebrations of this day before, it was not until May 30, 1916 that President Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential proclamation that it be recognized nationally. Then 33 years later, President Harry Truman signed an act of Congress on August 3, 1949 declaring that June 14 be recognized nationally as Flag Day.

Throughout the Old Testament, at least a remnant in each generation had to take up the mantel of the Law for the Jewish faith to remain alive. In today's Gospel reading we hear about Jesus calling the first disciples to show them and teach them about God, to witness His death and resurrection, and then to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread that message throughout the world.

America was designed to be a Christian nation where everyone could come and live free. Each generation has sought to take up that mantel of freedom, the true

symbol of the Stars and Stripes, to bring greater freedom to these shores and to the shores of other nations as well.

We are about to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta. Initially only Kings had freedom and rights. Then all landed gentry had freedoms and rights. Our nation's founders understood that our freedoms and rights are given to us from God. Initially, here in America, only all free men were recognized to have freedom and rights. Then we did away with legalized slavery and, eventually, all men were recognized to have freedom and rights. It was not until 1920 that women were given the right to vote and also gained freedom and rights here in America. If today we still recognize that our freedoms come from God, then we must take up our mantle and respond to the call of Jesus Christ and "do good", (as St. Paul calls us to do in today's Epistle). We need to discern the will of God then act on it just as generations before have done so well.

The problem is that many today have forgotten or never learned many of these things. Many today deny that America is what it is today because it was formed as a nation under God, a Christian nation, to allow all its peoples, Christian or not, to enjoy real freedom and rights. When we turn our back on God, when we turn away from God's Law and replace it with man's law, we lose our freedoms and our rights, and suffer the consequences of removing God's protection, God's Divine Providence from our lives and from our land.

This evening, our parish is hosting the Give Me Liberty Tour. Last year we had over 100 people gathered in our Community Center to hear about how our religious freedom is being taken away from us. I hope that you will join us this evening to hear three committed Christian men speak eloquently, powerfully, inspirationally and passionately about our religious freedom here in America. Please invite all your family and friends to join you us at 5 PM this evening in our Community Center. You will be awed and inspired. You will be informed and moved to stand up for your faith and for your God.

There is still work to be done today. We have done away with legalized slavery but today many are subject to human trafficking, a new form of human slavery. Today we have legalized the killing of the unborn and have sacrificed millions of lives. Next week is Father's Day. Let me share some sad statistics with you about the fatherless here in America.

- 24 million children in the United States of America live in a fatherless home.
- 40% of students in grades 1-12 come from homes with no biological father in them.
- 71% of teenage pregnant mothers have no father in the home.
- 71% of high school drop outs have no father present.
- A child is 4 times more likely to live in poverty if there is no dad in the home.

We have received the mantel - the Bible and the Christian faith - from our spiritual forefathers. We have received the mantel - the freedoms and rights - that our nation's Founding Fathers intended and even some they perhaps did not yet understand or intend. We now bear the burden of responsibility of that Mantel to pass on the Orthodox Christian faith as well as the freedoms and rights that so many have fought so hard for on these hallowed shores and all around the world.

May God bless us all to receive a double portion of the grace of God, to be fearless prophets of His Holy Gospel message, to keep the Law of God and to bring others to the fullness of the peace and joy we have in the Love of God. We have received a great gift. Let us not hide it in fear from the world but courageously share it that the Light and Love of God may shine forth to all the world for generations yet to come.

To God be the glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.