

July 8-9, 2017

Thoughts from the pastor,

Obviously I made it back from my week in Baltimore. I got back Monday night and even had the chance to watch the first of the fireworks of the evening from the plane. I hope everyone had a chance to unwind a little with the Independence Day celebration. Being in Baltimore gave me two perspectives to reflect on as I went through that holiday. I was able to think about what had to be done in order to have our independence and what we were protecting.

I had the chance to go to Fort McHenry, which was where one of the main battles of the War of 1812 was fought. Our nation had declared its independence from England but that did not mean that the British were giving up. They were still hanging on to the idea that they could gain from this new country. They wanted control of our resources. They had destroyed Washington, D.C. and were coming for Baltimore. These would give them a real hold on the shipping industry. From the sea they came with many ships to take Baltimore. Fort McHenry stood in their way. They blasted the fort for a whole day and night. Those manning the fort fired back at the ships. Francis Scott Key was on a ship in the harbor and was waiting to see who won. At that time the tradition was to raise the flag of a fort in the morning. He waited to see whose flag would be raised. When the flag of the U.S.A. was raised, he was inspired to write the words that were soon put to music and became the Star Spangled Banner. That represents what we had to do to have freedom.

I also had the chance to move along the paths of the Saints. They lived out those freedoms to live life on this world to the fullest so they could bring others to heaven. That is what freedom is for. I was at the shrine in Emmetsburg where St. Elizabeth Ann Seton lived and worked as a teacher and founder of a religious order, administrator of a school, and raised her family as a single mom. I was at the shrine that honored her time in Baltimore working at the St. Mary's Seminary and where she took her vows as a religious. Her house is still there and the chapel for the seminary is still there, but the seminary is gone.

I went to the National Shrine for St. Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorist Fathers. St. Alphonse Liguori Church is beautiful and was a couple blocks from the hotel. St. John Neumann was from Bohemia. He came to the U.S. and was ordained a Redemptorist Priest and served in that parish and became the 4<sup>th</sup> bishop of Philadelphia. He and St. Elizabeth Ann and several other Saints are honored in that church. I walked the city to see as many churches as possible. I even went to some Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches that I was interested in because they had Tiffany Glass stained-glass windows. The freedom to live out our faith is so critical.

Our religious freedom is something we really have to take seriously for it has been under attack. We did not do much for the Fortnight for Freedom in the parish this year but I wanted to do this trip for our parish. The Knights of Columbus sponsor the Forty Days of Prayer before the celebration of Independence Day as a way of keeping us in tune with the realities of these attacks on religious freedom.

Last weekend the second collection was for the work Fr. John is doing in building a spirituality center in Togo, West Africa. With some of the extra checks and gifts, the total with that second collection is over \$6,000. Fr. John will be heading back to Togo on Thursday. We will wire the money over there for him. Thank you for your generosity.

Before I left on vacation I had the opportunity to play softball for the Priests of the Archdiocese of Omaha as we competed against the Priests of the Diocese of Lincoln. If you have been listening to KVSS, Spirit FM 102.7 in the mornings you would already know the results. The weather was perfect. It was mid 70's, and a clear sky. The only problem was the sun getting in some of the fielder's eyes, especially the pitchers. The catcher would throw the ball back to the pitcher. I saw a lot of solar eclipses right before I ducked the ball.

But then we got to the sixth and last inning. The last batter of the game, Fr. Paul Hoelsing, one of Omaha's best priest athletes, came to the plate. The score was 21 to 17 with Lincoln just having taken over the lead. The bases were actually loaded. I know it sounds like fake news but this is true. All he had to do was hit his second home run of the day and we would tie the game. It was so exciting. The crowd was hushed, because most of them were fans for the Lincoln team. There was one pitch, way off the plate. Their pitchers were getting tired. Another bad pitch came. Personally I was just worried they might make us go into extra innings. The pitch came and Fr. Paul blasted it. Just not far enough and it was caught and the game was over. It was awesome even if we lost.

It was such a great game. The priests had pizza after the game and compared scars. Lots of scrapes, cuts, bruises, and sore muscles. Luckily I don't think we had any bigger injuries. Once again I was not given any award for being the oldest player on the field even though I was and have been. For those of you who were there from the parish, thank you for your support. For the rest of you, watch for it next year.

God bless you,  
Fr. Frank