

Deacon Tom Homilies ©
God's Gift of America

MONDAY JULY 3rd 2006
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Because of travels, it has been so long since I've had to put together a homily – and yet I've had these thoughts simmering in my heart – with feelings in me much like a hoped-for stew simmering on the stove...

On this day just prior to our beautiful celebration of our independence – I have words and images to share with you... and may I start with Colorado. We know how many of us – locals and visitors care for this wonderful state. We love it when they play and sing the song Colorado after our liturgies... Those words we nod our heart-felt assent to: "... and if God doesn't live in Colorado – I'll be this is where He spends most of his time."

But I have just returned from some 4,000 miles of driving – heading east and stopping in places that are gentle, beautiful and touching in their own right... We stopped in Hays, Kansas and spent the night. We went to a Saturday evening Mass at a simple, but gentle in-town church. It felt holy and respectful inside. And -- they do a half hour of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament after every Mass on the first Sunday of the Month. What a wonderful, wonderful and powerful practice – would that all Catholic churches could start something like that.

We drove through Missouri and Illinois and Indiana – passing through the heartland of America... I recall the first chapter of the Old Testament – in Genesis it is written that the Lord God planted a garden in a place called Eden. Eden is derived from a Sumerian word meaning 'fertile plain.' And there is a word similar to Eden in the Hebrew language.

In Hebrew, that word Eden means 'delight.' And it touches my heart to say that we are so blessed to live in America – a true land of fertile plains – a delight to most all people of good heart.

In our travels – along interstates but also on back roads – I saw people who had planted signs on their properties... God Bless America... God Bless Our Troops... I saw a young mother in a van – she had a bumper sticker that said, "One half of my heart is in Iraq." – It was very easy to envision her as a military wife carrying on the duties of being mother and father to her family while her husband served overseas.

I saw barns painted with the American flag. We stopped in Burlington, Colorado – home of a long-time parishioner here. In that town, they were celebrating the return of some soldier who had served overseas. Up and down main-street, and on shaded neighborhood streets, there were flags and banners and 'welcome home' signs with his name.

We saw the beauty of Pennsylvania's rural Mennonite and Amish countryside. On Sunday mornings, you can take a cup of coffee out on the front deck and though unseen, there was a hypnotic 'clip clop, clip clop, clip clop' sound – horses pulling buggies of folks going to church and worship. Often buggies were preceded by dozens of plainly dressed folks riding on bicycles – also going to church.

My wife and I went to a Mass – and among the music they did were two songs... one was "How great Thou art." Do you remember the words?

“... When through the woods and forest glades I wander, and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees... when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur... and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.... Then sings my soul... how great Thou art...” After the Mass – after the closing religious hymn – people were invited to stay and sing America the Beautiful. “Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain... for purple mountains majesties, above the fruited plain...” I’ll tell you that most everyone stayed and sang with great emotion... and the voice I heard the loudest was the pastor of that Church – and he had processed out already. There was applause – and many people were dabbing tears from their cheeks. How can we not be touched in our hearts with this land of ours – this gift from God?

In closing my reflection for today – may I return to a theme that resonates in my heart every year during these holiday periods? We are – all of us in all countries and all places – we are sons and daughters of the One God. We are all in the ‘Palm of His Hand.’ But for reasons that are far larger than our intellects – you and I have been given the gift, the opportunity and the challenge to live in America. It is a land of milk and honey. For most people of good heart, it is the Promised Land this side of Eternity. I encourage us – all of us to be Disciples of Christ – disciples of our faith. But I also encourage us to be Disciples of America, using the words from today’s Responsorial... **Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.** America isn’t perfect – but it is a gift from God – given to us for His reasons. Let us show our appreciation. God Bless America.... And all other peoples as well.