

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we remember those who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of others. Liberation is, “the act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression; to release.” We remember these individuals by having parades, picnics, and food events. Citizens gather together in community to celebrate freedom by sharing stories and a meal. Symbols of freedom are displayed to remind us of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the good of all.

Today I ask that you to honor not only those who fought for **our** freedom, but to also to honor **all those** who sacrificed (and are sacrificing) their lives in order to break the chains of slavery, oppression, injustice, and persecution everywhere. These men and women left their families, friends, careers, hopes and dreams behind to go to unfamiliar places to confront hate, oppression, and aggression. They went to defend freedom and truth, and paid with their lives.

Slavery, oppression, injustice, and persecution are often associated with political and legal systems. But spiritually, we are all imprisoned and oppressed by sin. We are held captive by pride and greed. Obsession with wealth and power holds us prisoner, depriving us from loving others freely and completely. Selfishness tears relationships apart. Trust is conditional. The chains of intolerance keep us from offering compassion and solidarity.

Arrogance holds us captive to ourselves, rejecting the wisdom of God. Hate is the weapon of mass destruction. It kills freedom and replaces it with fear.

These assaults on our spirit, on our soul, are not assaults of the past, but continue to ravage the world today. Division, hate, extremism, intolerance, and unimaginable violence are in the news, every day. While these actions are oppressive and violent to society, they also hold our spirits captive in fear.

Imagine the pain, suffering, and fear of the survivors of these unrelenting acts of violence - in places of commerce and government, in places of worship, and most tragically, places of education. Those left behind are held enslaved by survivor's guilt, the unimaginable pain of the loss of loved ones, rage at the senselessness of these acts, doubt in God's goodness, and in fear of the unknown.

In the United States, we are reeling from division in our government, uncertainty in the economy, and unaddressed violence against the innocent and the young. The spirit of our nation is being persecuted and oppressed by hateful intolerance and the abuse of power and greed.

In our world, we see how power, greed, and hate is not only assaulting political and legal systems, but how it is oppressing and holding captive the spirit of ordinary citizens (on all sides). Innocent, vulnerable, and responsible citizens are suffering due to the pride, greed, and hate by others.

The people in our companion Diocese in Zimbabwe are imprisoned through political division, oppression, violence, corruption, abduction, and torture. The sins of power and greed sew the seeds of oppression and fear. When liberators work for change, they are often abducted, assaulted, or murdered. The Diocese of Masvingo is working diligently to break the chains of poverty through education, occupational training, farming efforts, and simple entrepreneurship.

History books retell the stories of many who broke through the political and legal barriers to liberate others. As faithful Christians, we rely on scripture to retell the stories of our liberation from sin. In Acts, Paul calls on the Name of Jesus to free a young slave girl from being imprisoned by spirits, much to the dismay of her owners. Rather than rejoice in her liberation, greed prevailed. No good deed goes left unpunished. Paul and Silas were physically incarcerated, but were not held captive. They were free in the love of Christ, and prayed and sang about it, not being concerned with their situation. They were so unconcerned that even when an earthquake made it possible to escape, they stayed and established a relationship with the guard.

Paul and Silas were able to liberate the guard and his family, offering them the freedom and joy of Jesus through faith, releasing them from the oppression of fear. In Revelation, we hear how those who ‘wash their robes’ will be liberated from sin and suffering. They will hear the Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” “Let

anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.” All who enter the gate will be able to love fully and freely!

In our Gospel, Jesus delivers his final prayer, petitioning that all may come to know of the pure, and unifying love between the Father and the Son. Jesus prays for hearts to be unlocked, and to participate fully in the love and glory between the Father and the Son. In doing so, this profound love leaves no room for hate, power, greed and oppression.

The apostles were liberators. They faced hate, rejection, oppression, and incarceration in order to spread the message of freedom – freedom from sin, freedom from doubt, freedom from despair and freedom from hopelessness. They made personal sacrifices and called on Jesus to liberate others from their captivity to sin. The freedom in Christ gave them strength to endure the works of evil, and to trust in the providence of God.

Of course, Jesus is our greatest liberator. He faced the same world of hate, rejection, and oppression - the world of intolerance, injustice, and corruption. Jesus was armed with the power of God’s love, and used it generously, mercifully, and compassionately. But, unlike other liberators, his ultimate sacrifice was for the good of all creation, giving us the first fruits of everlasting freedom, and a promise of hope, a vision of everlasting life.

Similar to our Memorial Day commemoration, we gather in community, have a procession, have a feast at the Eucharistic table, and retell the stories of the past. In Scripture we recall the stories of God's liberating action throughout history. And finally, we are reminded of our liberation when we gaze upon our symbol of freedom, the Cross. It is through the Cross that we find hope in the Resurrection, when the chains of sin and death are broken by God's immeasurable love, forgiveness, and mercy. We look at the Cross through the eyes of faith and a heart filled with hope.

So, on this weekend, as we gather to remember the liberators of our past in parades, events, food, and symbols, let us not forget our greatest liberator of all. Honor our heroes at the parades, go to the special events, have a feast of thanksgiving for their service, and gaze upon the American Flag as our nation's symbol of freedom. But also, as Christians, we gather in community here in this place, partake in the feast of thanksgiving (the Eucharist), and gaze upon the Cross that is our symbol of freedom. It is through and beyond this symbol of liberation that we can envision, in faith, the gift of everlasting life. Amen.