

July 5, 2026—14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of the parts of the Holy Mass that gives me a thrill every time I say the words is the Creed, which begins, **“I believe in one God”**. Don’t you feel that way, too? Why do I say this? We are so blessed to be able to profess our faith out loud. During the Roman persecution, for 250 years, Catholics would be arrested and put to death for professing their faith in the one true God and Jesus His Son and participating in the Mass. In Communist countries and Muslim countries today, you must say the Creed privately or secretly, so that no one can hear it, or face severe penalties. What a blessing that we are free to say them inside, or even outside, our Church building. We should say them with enthusiasm!

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America, we must be grateful for the freedoms that we possess in our country, especially, the freedom of religion. On July 4, 1776, the congress issued the Declaration of Independence, saying: **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”** Notice that these rights do not come from the government, but from God, Himself. The very first amendment to the Constitution concerns the freedom of religion. It states that it is a fundamental right; this amendment is meant to protect the individual’s practice of religion, while ensuring that the government does not interfere with it or establish one religion that everyone must follow.

Almighty God is the greatest champion of our freedom in two ways. First, He wants us to do what is right and just, but He allows us to make decisions freely, even when we choose something that is wrong and hurtful to our relationship with Him and our salvation. He does not strike us with a lightning bolt when we do wrong. Instead, He gave us the commandments and a teaching Church which administers the grace of the sacraments and preaches the Word to assist us. In the end, we must freely decide to do what is right and to love God and neighbor.

In the Gospel this Sunday, we heard the prayer of Jesus to His Heavenly Father. Two other times we hear the words of His personal prayer: in the Agony of the Garden and from the Cross. As we just heard, He prayed, **“I give praise to You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although You have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, You have revealed them to the little ones.”** The religious leaders, such as the Scribes and the Pharisees, were known for their expertise in the Law of God, but they missed what God was doing in their midst

through Jesus. God's plan was hidden to them because of pride; their hearts were closed to Him. On the other hand, those who were not experts in religion, namely the Apostles and disciples of Jesus, the little ones, were able to understand who He was and how the Father was revealing Himself through His divine and human Son. The difference between these two groups was not so much about intelligence or education but between pride and humility.

The First Reading gave us one of the many Old Testament passages that were fulfilled in Jesus. Those who knew the Scriptures should have recognized Jesus in it. The Prophet Zecharia wrote: **"Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass."** When king Solomon rode into Jerusalem for his coronation as king, he rode on a humble donkey. His brother who would like to have been king rode on a great black stallion, surrounded by his armed men. Solomon wanted to be a different kind of king: one who was humble and peaceful. Jesus deliberately chose to ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday for his coronation, which took place on the Cross, by riding on a humble donkey like King Solomon. Zecharia continued his prophecy by saying the future king would banish the weapons of war and proclaim peace to the nations.

In the second half of this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus proclaims Himself to be the kind of king prophesied by Zecharia. **"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."** Jesus will not turn us away from His mercy and grace if we freely choose Him with humility.

There is another way in which we use the word "pride" in English. Take pride in your work, I'm proud of my son, I am proud of my country, which is called patriotism. If it is not distorted or carried to the extreme, this attitude is a virtue.

Don't misinterpret St. Paul's contrast between **"the flesh and the spirit"** in the Second Reading. He is not saying the body is evil and the soul is good. There was an ancient heresy called Gnosticism that taught the material world, including the human body was evil; in their distorted teaching, it was only the immaterial things like the soul that were good. Pope St. John Paul made it abundantly clear in his Theology of the Body that not only was the soul made **"in the image and likeness of God,"** but so was the human body. When St. Paul speaks of the flesh, he is speaking about the evil tendencies and desires that come from our fallen nature. Even after Baptism we have concupiscence, which is the tendency to sin; God

expects us to do battle with those tendencies. When the Pharisees were obsessing over the laws concerning the distinction between food that was clean or unclean, Jesus taught “**Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean . . . For it is from within . . . that evil intentions emerge . . . and make a man unclean**” (Mark 7). The second way God gives us freedom is through His mercy. He gives us the power to conquer sin and the devil.

Jesus said, “**You will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.**” It is His mercy and His teaching and His grace that takes the heavy burden of sin off us and gives us true freedom to choose Him!