

## Sermon for Independence Day

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In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, British author and philosopher, Thomas Hobbes wrote, "In the state of nature there are no arts, no letters, no society and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." The solution to this pitiful situation is for society to form a government so that civilization can be organized. Without government, Thomas Hobbes believed, "The condition of man is a condition of war of everyone against everyone."

It seemed to Hobbes that a particular group of people had been equipped and ordained by God to establish government and rule the people: Kings and Queens. These Kings and Queens were *not* the same as you and me. You and I are subject to the law of the land; Royalty made the law of the land and was subject *only* to God. This political theory, The Divine Right of Kings, was more than text book philosophy; it was how government operated, indeed was supposed to operate. The people recognized that not all Kings and Queens would be saintly, some in fact, had been scoundrels, but, the belief was that, whether sinner or saint, the sovereign had been chosen to rule by God. Rebellion against the lawful sovereign was not only illegal and punishable by death; rebellion was a sin against God's holy ordering of society and punishable by eternal damnation. The Church preached loyalty to the sovereign and denounced those who broke their oaths of loyalty. The first English prayer book included in the ordination service oaths of loyalty to the sovereign as Head of the Church.

Three centuries after Hobbes wrote, a group of men gathered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to sign a document that would change their form of government. This document, "The Declaration of Independence", begins this way, "**When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. 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.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,...**" The freedom that we share as a nation is founded upon a particular socio-political understanding. The sociological understanding is that "all men are created equal." The political understanding is that government derives its powers "from the consent of the governed." But, even these foundational truths rest upon religious bedrock, "The Laws of Nature and Nature's God." There was never any question in the minds of the founding fathers that all power was derivative of the almighty power of God. The enlightenment had proved Thomas Hobbes wrong; Royalty was not a special class of human being chosen by God to rule. "All men are created equal" and the ability to

govern is derived from the people being governed. No longer “The Divine Right of Kings” but an even older idea first voiced by Alcuin, British monk and scholar in the court of Charlemagne in the 8th century, “Vox Populi, Vox Dei,” “The voice of the people is the voice of God.”

The United States of America was founded and remains “one nation under God”. We have not been a perfect nation. We permitted slavery that belied our belief in the equality of men. Godless, Marxist – Communism, a socio-political system that actively repressed any religious ideals, rose and fell in less than 100 years. And it took us a couple of centuries to understand that women as well as men have equality before God and under the law. Still, the philosophical and religious ideals of our nation have withstood the test of time and comparison. More recently Islamic extremists, who pervert their own religion and culture, would like to take away our freedoms through terror and threats of terror. Many believe that they will fail as others have failed, Communists, Nazis, and others, because we have a superior

military – industrial complex. Yet, in 1776, the signers of the Declaration of Independence, men like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams faced the most formidable military force in the world, The British Empire, relying not on armed might but on the grace and protection of God and their individual willingness to do the right thing regardless of the cost. In our current conflict with terrorists, we must remember that F-15 fighter aircraft, unmanned drones, Special Forces troops and all the counter intelligence in the world cannot defeat evil. Darkness is overcome by light and good overcomes evil. Need I remind you that only God is good?

Knowing that their declaration of independence could mean the loss of everything, including their lives, the signers closed with these words: **“And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine providence; we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortune and our sacred honor.”**

God bless America, now and always. Amen.