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His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco issues message regarding Independence Day 2020

Brothers and sisters in the Lord,

To hear the words of the Declaration of Independence can still bring a shiver to my spirit. "***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.***" These words sparked the American Revolution, providing our nation, then and now, with an ideal that still inspires, and also still needs to be accomplished for all our citizens. We live in a nation founded on a set of principles, enshrined in that Declaration ratified on July 4, 1776.

We celebrate this momentous occasion, the birthday of our nation, and the ideals that it professes. These ideals and the promise of America attracted our immigrant ancestors. They were drawn to a land that would open her doors to people of all races and creeds and nationalities. They wept when they saw the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, knowing that they were beginning a new life.

Yet they did not always experience that welcome right away. Our immigrant ancestors were subjected to racial policies, discrimination, and violence. It would take a generation or two to find acceptance and to secure the rights we saw others enjoy. It took the courage of our leaders to proclaim our equality within the society, such as the effort to have the Eastern Orthodox Faith declared a “major religion” in the United States.

This is the never-finished business of our nation: extending the ideals of equality to all, no matter their background, race, creed, or nationality, so eloquently and potently proclaimed on this day almost 250 years ago. Teaching these ideals to our children is part of that generational task, recalling the struggles of the past. Take a moment with them to explore our nation’s history. Go beyond the myths and into the depths of that history, but always look to the future.

The July 4th holiday is not just a time to celebrate with fireworks and backyard barbeques. It is also a time to look forward with that same vision as the founding fathers. Today is a day to commit ourselves to a greater resolve towards the fulfillment of that vision.

Let us, therefore, celebrate this day with pride as American citizens. Let us also celebrate that we are Orthodox Christians. In the Book of Psalms we read, “ ***Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance,***” (Psalm 33:12). Indeed, we are a blessed nation, and God has given us this opportunity to succeed and achieve great things for His Glory! Let us work to extend those blessings to all.

God Bless You and God Bless America!

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