

Homily 14th Sunday Cycle C July 4, 2010

It was the 3rd of July and two Jehovah Witnesses came knocking on the door. "May we come in and visit for a while?" "Sure," said the owner, "come on in. Let's go into the kitchen. Have a seat. Here's some iced tea for you. Now, what would you like to talk about?"

"I don't know," one of them said. "We've never gotten this far before!"

Last Sunday, Jesus is walking some 85 miles to Jerusalem, sends some messengers on ahead of him, and makes it to Samaria, only thirty miles from Jerusalem. Today he appoints 72 more to preach in 36 towns in just 30 miles? There aren't 36 towns and places that close to Jerusalem! It doesn't make sense.

Turns out that at the time of Jesus people believed that in the whole world there were 72 nations; (you can count them in Genesis 10.) So, in this passage, Jesus is sending his followers into the whole world, into every country.

Today, there are about 257 countries in the world, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. (The United States is 244th on that alphabetical list.) So, when Jesus sends out 72, it means that he is sending someone to what would become the United States of America. Like you. Or me.

Jesus tells the 72 something just amazing: "I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and *the full force of the enemy.*" "I have given you power to tread upon the full force of the enemy!"

It's July 4. 234 years ago the thirteen colonies declared independence from Great Britain. The colonists knew who the enemy was; it was King George. In the Revolutionary War, 25,000 colonists died; British soldiers wore bright red and they were easy targets. (Bad idea to wear bright red.) You can go to Virginia and see the trenches where the colonists stood.

Now, in 2010, who or what is the “full force of the enemy?” Is it the other political parties—or is the enemy something else? “I have given you power over demons.” What demons roam our nation? Who is the enemy in 2010?

Americans are 6% of the world’s population, but we consume two-thirds of the world’s illegal drugs....the United States has more prisoners by far than any other country in the world, and also the highest rate of incarceration. Our country has only the ninth best infant mortality rate. We have the 24th highest per capita murder rate of the 257 countries on the planet (Columbia is the worst), and 3000+ abortions per day. The enemy isn’t the political group we disagree with: the enemy is clear. The enemy is the Evil One. Satan.

“I have given you power to tread upon...the full force of the enemy.” And what power do we have? Muskets, bayonets, cannons? We can write thoughtful letters. We can talk and listen to one another. We can vote. We can read and research. We can go out and actually do some good.

But if the enemy of our country is in fact the Evil One, then our power must be spiritual. And our best weapon will be prayer.

So, before the cornhole, while the chicken is on the grill, or after the fireworks, we might make our own Declaration of Independence: God, please free each of us and our nation from demons and from the True Enemy—but never, ever free us from You!