

## GOD BLESS AMERICA

2020

I can still remember the year... It was in 1982 when my husband suggested we look at the possibility of moving to Florida. Quite frankly, I thought he was out of his mind! The fact that I was born, raised, and had been living for thirty-eight years in the Province of Quebec, his idea sounded absolutely ludicrous to me. Furthermore, just the thought of leaving my family and friends behind was something I would have never contemplated. Thus, my first impulse was to say "NO" to my dear husband's fantasy. Yet, I agreed to sit down with him, and for us to analyze the pros and cons of such a plan.

His idea was prompted by one of his associates at work, as he had just moved to California. My husband would have never considered relocating to California, but Florida seemed quite appealing to him since his parents and brothers were already living there. Also, the weather in the Sunshine State was certainly a plus, not to mention how much my husband loved the USA for many reasons. Primarily, for the Country's adherence to our Christian beliefs which was more prevalent back then than it was in our part of the country. Furthermore, our Province was in much turmoil with the 'Separatist Movement' pushing its agenda in order to obtain a complete independence from Canada; and with which we did not agree at all. Lastly, our taxes were ridiculously high, our freedom of choice between English and French languages was dwindling, and the medical care system was getting out of control.

I cannot deny that these factors were all good reasons for considering this move. However, there were many other elements to evaluate before we could make a wise decision in the matter. The well-being of our children who were three, seven, and nine years old at the time, was our top priority in assessing the ramifications in making such an important move. As we sought God's guidance, and we both discussed at length the logistics of it all, it became clear to us it would be a great opportunity for our family.

After months of deliberation and planning, the long-awaited day finally arrived. On June 23, 1983 we packed the trunk of our car with the bare minimum; the rest of our belongings having been moved to a storage facility, until our arrival in Fort Lauderdale. To say we were excited is an understatement! I have to admit though that I felt a hint of sadness in my heart... Leaving my birth country, family, and friends, not to mention the fear of the unknown definitely put a damper on my enthusiasm, but fortunately it was short lived. We were heading to a new country, and looking forward to a new adventure, for which there was no turning back.

Now here we are, thirty seven years later. Do we have any regrets as to our decision? Absolutely not. Obviously, there were some adjustments that had to be made as we settled in. We faced new challenges as well, but with God's help we pulled through. Years later, my husband and I became American citizens, and our children followed suit as they became adults. I am happy to say that we are part of millions of legal immigrants who ultimately made this great country their home as law-abiding citizens.

Recently, my husband asked my help while he was repairing the flagpole on our front lawn. The repairs done, he then attached the American flag to the rope, and slowly raised it up. As I watched him, lyrics of the song, 'God Bless the USA', resonated on my mind. I felt blessed that this country had been our home for so many years already. Yet, there was sadness as well as I reflected on all the changes that had occurred in our nation since our move in 1983. It was obvious that our country had lost some of its values that had been so dear to us in the first place. These changes may have been gradual, but they had become more evident and prevalent as the years went by.

I have to admit at this time that our present situation, nationwide, is certainly not at its best. The hatred and violence amongst certain groups, the riots, the protests, the bickering between political parties as

well as the controversies on many issues are at a high level. We are living in very troubled times. People feel ostracized, unjustly treated, and their actions demonstrate the hatred and revenge they hold in their hearts. As they take matters into their own hands to protest against the injustice, they are now becoming burglars, murderers and non-abiding law citizens. I understand this is not a new phenomenon. We don't have to go far back in history to prove it. However, this is not only happening in our country; it is a worldwide problem as well. COVID-19 may be a pandemic on a physical level but this one, I believe, is on a deeper level...the human heart.

Being of dual nationalities, my heart and allegiance are first and foremost to the USA. On a human standpoint, I am deeply grateful to be an American. In spite of all the turmoil within our nation, I firmly believe that our country is the best one to live in. However, as a Christian, I must admit that my greatest fear is of losing what made our nation so great in the first place... ONE NATION UNDER GOD. Oh, I may ruffle some feathers here, but I cannot deny that it is a daunting possibility. As you may know, when God is left out...all hell breaks loose!

Recently, I read an excerpt from a book titled 'Can God Bless America?' written by John McArthur, a Christian author, teacher, and pastor. I will share some of his comments which, I believe, describe very well where we now stand as a nation.

"Anti-God philosophies and worldviews now clearly dominate most of Western society. God has been removed from public discourse; prayer has been virtually banned from the public arena; agnosticism and humanism dominate public policy. So, it is remarkable that the slogan 'God Bless America' is still in vogue."

His comments certainly make us question ourselves not only as a nation, but also as individuals. How can we expect God to bless America when we don't give Him the time of day? How can we expect Him to give us His blessings when we're not even interested in finding out who He is, and when we ignore His commandments and principles by which we should live a life He would approve of? What is it that He requires from us, so as to be in right standing with Him, and to have a relationship which will then result in His blessings on us?

'Independence Day' is right around the corner. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, we will be commemorating the 'Declaration of Independence' from Great Britain in 1776. Every year, in our nation, it is a cause for celebration. The coronavirus may put a damper on it this year, but usually we have festivities ranging from fireworks, parades, concerts, and to more casual family gatherings and barbecues. Rallies and prayer meetings are being organized across our nation as well, and waves of patriotism revive the slogan 'God Bless America'. Originally, it was a prayer for divine blessing, but now I am wondering what it really means for most of us. Do we just say it as a slogan, or do we mean it with all of our hearts? And most of all, what kind of blessings are we really looking for?

The author continues, "Some apparently believe that America enjoys God's blessing by divine right. After all, God has blessed America throughout history to a remarkable degree. But His blessings are not measured - as most people believe - by material affluence, power and world dominance. The greatest blessings God has graciously given America have been spiritual blessings."

He goes on asking very relevant and important questions as well. "What are the means by which the people of God should seek to have God's blessing on our nation? Can we help position modern society to receive God's blessing merely by influencing public policy through politics and protest, or is something more needed to fulfill the conditions under which God will bless our nation? Can external moral reform alone make America fit for God's blessing, or is something even deeper needed in the lives of most Americans?"

We are certainly searching for answers, and we can find them in the Word of God. "It is out of the heart that evil thoughts come, as well as murder, adultery, sexual immorality, stealing, false testimony, and slander." (Matthew 15:19) This scripture clearly tells us the real source of our problems is the human heart. So, first and foremost, people's hearts need to be changed; and it has to happen on a widespread scale in order to deeply impact all of our society. I believe that political strategies to help our nation's moral depravity are not the answer for the underlying spiritual problems that really exist. I am definitely not against efforts to outlaw abortion, drug abuse and similar forms of wickedness. However, law cannot make people righteous, and God's blessings cannot be gained by any law reform.

Furthermore, we cannot only point fingers at others for all the evil. Although we may not be the ones blatantly doing it, we may not be helping to solve the problem either. As Christians and God's people, it would be wise to ask ourselves... How much of a testimony are we to those around us? How much of an example are we? Are we setting models of love, mercy, and compassion? Are we sharing with others that Jesus is really the answer to all this mayhem in our nation, and throughout the world for that matter? In fact, it all boils down to this: once people become reconciled to God, they become reconciled to each other. Does it sound too simplistic and unrealistic? Perhaps. However, we cannot underestimate the power of prayers as we ask God for his mercy and compassion on our nation.

I cannot overemphasize the point that God cannot actually bless America, as a whole, unless the hearts of people are changed and regenerated; that is unless lives are transformed by the power of Christ. God sent His one and only Son on this earth for a reason; and it was to die for us, for the forgiveness of our sins. God is holy, and we are not. Thus, His only criterion for us in becoming righteous in His eyes, and in having a true relationship with Him, is to accept His way of reconciliation through His Son, Jesus.

I realize this letter may sound negative, or perhaps even controversial to some people. My intention is certainly not to put a damper on anyone's festivities as we celebrate 'Independence Day'. This letter is essentially a cry to God for Him to reach out and touch people's hearts nationwide as well as worldwide. It is a message of hope in that by His grace and infinite mercy, He may transform the lives of people who respond to His calling. It is also a wakeup call for the people of God, reminding us to do our part in this regeneration process. As it becomes a reality, God may ultimately answer our prayer, 'God Bless America'.

Due to COVID-19, the 'Independence Day' celebrations will most probably look a little different this year. Nevertheless, we can still celebrate with the proper safe distancing guidelines. So keep safe, and may you have a fantastic holiday!

To my family, friends, and fellow Americans...

**HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!**

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