

SHOULD GOD BLESS AMERICA?

2023

I still remember the day in 1982 when, out of the blue, my dear husband suggested we move to Florida. Quite frankly, I thought it was the most ludicrous idea I've ever heard! Having lived in Quebec since I was born - 38 years to be exact - I found it quite difficult to be open-minded and rational about relocating to another country... However, I finally agreed to sit down with him, and discuss his motives for considering such a big move for our family.

Other than the fact that his own family had been living there since the 1960s, and the climate was certainly a plus, his main reason was based on political, economic and social issues in our province at the time; and with which we both did not agree at all. However, after we asked God for guidance, listed the pros and cons, and understood the logistics of such a move; we concluded that the most important aspect was the Christian values in the U.S. - particularly in the south - which were more prevalent than in our province. In the end, it was clear that this move would be a positive experience for us and our three young children. Therefore, after months of planning and preparation, we finally set a date for our departure.

On the morning of June 23, 1983 we packed the trunk of our car with everything we needed for our 4-day trip down south. The rest of our belongings were already in storage, and ready to be shipped upon our arrival in Fort Lauderdale. To say that we were excited is an understatement! I must say, though, that I felt a certain sadness... Leaving my homeland, family and friends behind, not to mention the fear of the unknown, certainly put a damper on my enthusiasm. Fortunately, it was short lived. We were on our way to a new country, and eager to begin a new adventure, for which there was no turning back...

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

Some time ago, my husband asked me to help him fix 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, the chorus of the song "God Bless the USA" resonated in my mind. I felt truly blessed that this country had been our home for so many years already. Yet there was sadness as I reflected on all the changes that had happened in our nation since our move in 1983. It was obvious that our country had lost some of its values that were so dear to us in the first place. These changes might have been gradual, but they had become more evident and prevalent as the years went by.

Without question, our present situation, nationwide, is certainly not at its best. If political turmoil and economic uncertainty weren't making life hard enough, the moral and cultural freefall we're witnessing has left many of us wondering if we're near a breaking point. Headlines are dominated by mob violence, senseless destruction, and political corruption. Almost everywhere we look, we see dire news. And this is not only happening in our country; it's a worldwide reality.

Being of dual nationalities, my heart and allegiance are first and foremost to the USA. From a human standpoint, I am deeply grateful to be an American. Despite the problems in our country, I strongly believe it is the best place to live. But as a Christian, I must admit that my biggest fear

is to lose what made our nation great in the first place... ONE NATION UNDER GOD. I can't deny that it is a daunting possibility. And when God is excluded...all hell breaks loose.

Some time ago, I read an excerpt from the book 'Can God Bless America?' written by John MacArthur, pastor-teacher and author. I am sharing here 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. 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."

His comments certainly raise questions not only for us as a nation, but for us as individuals. The Word of God says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord..."¹ But, frankly, how can we expect God to bless America when most of our society nowadays doesn't give Him the time of day; isn't even interested in finding out who He is; and ignores His instructions on how to live a life He would approve of?

We're certainly looking for answers, and we can find them in God's Word, the Bible. In fact, the following Scripture specifically demonstrates that the real source of our problems is the human heart. "It is out of the heart that evil thoughts come, as well as murder, adultery, sexual immorality, stealing, false testimony, and slander."² On this basis, can we assume that political strategies to help our nation's moral depravity are the answers to the underlying spiritual problems that really exist? While making laws against abortion, drug abuse and similar forms of wickedness is important; laws cannot make people righteous, and God's blessings cannot be gained by any law reform. So, what can be done?

Above all, the hearts of people need to be transformed. Why? Because God is holy, and we are not... The reality is that we're all born sinners. We only have to watch a group of little kids play together and interact with each other to see that sinful behavior comes naturally. No one has to teach a child to lie or be selfish. Because of our sinful nature, we are all spiritually dead, which means that we are separated from God. We therefore need to be reconciled to God. But how can it be done?

The Bible says, "God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."³ God has given us His most precious and perfect gift of all in His Son, Jesus... "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."⁴ And to corroborate this, Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."⁵

Our part is to believe in Jesus, which means not merely knowing who He is, and the facts about Him and His life, but having an absolute trust in Him. We need to recognize that we are sinners, and to sincerely repent; to surrender our hearts and lives to God; to obey His Word, and to follow Him wherever He leads us. In doing so, we find rest for our souls, joy, peace and divine love, which are some of God's most precious blessings. And ultimately, when our journey on earth is over, He promises eternal life in His presence. It is, in fact, God's only plan for the reconciliation and salvation of mankind, and for us to receive His blessings.

As believers, how then can we be influential in making a difference in the lives of people around us? In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the analogy of salt and light to teach His disciples how they are to live out their lives.⁶ Therefore, as salt adds flavor to the food, so are we to season the world with the goodness of God through our actions and words. And as the light shines in the darkness, so also are we to shine the light of Christ on a spiritually dark world... In essence, we're called to be an ongoing witness to the reality of Jesus' presence in our lives. In practical terms, how do we respond to His calling?

Above all, by sharing the good news of the Gospel, and that Jesus is really the answer to all the chaos that exists in our nation; by showing His love, mercy, and compassion to those we come in contact with; by being a living testimony that Jesus has the power to change hearts and lives; by praying earnestly and faithfully for the people of our nation, and for those who govern it. In fact, it all boils down to this: once reconciled with God, people will begin to live godly lives and, in turn, they will become His witnesses to those around them. Does it sound too simplistic or even unrealistic? Maybe to some people, but we can never underestimate the fervent prayers of true believers, and the power of God to answer them.

Every year on July 4th, our nation celebrates Independence Day. We have festivities ranging from fireworks, parades, concerts, to more casual family gatherings and barbecues. In spite of all the turmoil within our nation, we'll see rallies and prayer meetings across our nation, and waves of patriotism will revive the slogan, 'God Bless America'. Originally, it was a prayer for divine blessing, but nowadays what does it really mean for most people? 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 mainly looking for? Of earthly or eternal value...or perhaps both?

I realize that this letter may sound a little negative, and even controversial to some people. My intention here is not to put a damper on anyone's festivities as we celebrate this holiday. It's essentially a prayer to God for Him to reach out and touch people's hearts, nationwide. It's 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's also a wake-up call for the people of God, reminding us to do our part in this regeneration process. And as the author of the patriotic song, 'God Bless America', expressed it so well; may God answer our prayers *to bless America, the land that we love; to stand beside her and guide her, through the night with the light from above...*

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



HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY, EVERYONE!

¹Psalms 33:12a ²Matthew 15:19 ³Romans 5:8 ⁴Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁵John 14:6 ⁶Matthew 5:13-14