

**Independence Day 2024**

Deuteronomy 10: 17-21

Psalm 145

Hebrews 11: 8-16

Matthew 5: 43-48

**AMERICA the BEAUTIFUL**

With all the turmoil rampant in these days with division amongst our sisters and brothers,  
I would like us to take a few moments in prayer to center ourselves in Christ,  
and the God of our Creation, our life, and our love.  
So to speak, the 'ground' of our being.

Have you ever considered that the earth is a living creature -  
French Jesuit priest, palaeontologist - and hero of mine, as you've heard many times -  
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin promulgated the idea in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,  
that the earth, the whole of Creation, even God, evolves.  
We are discovering that even the Church, woolly mammoth that she is - changes.  
Tielhard demonstrates his concept of evolutionary theory  
by describing the rising of tectonic plates,  
the swell and fall of the oceans, arctic ice-flows, raging volcanoes.

I've felt Tielhard's sense of wonder and awe of creation  
in my journeys around our country -  
climbing the mountains of North Central New Mexico,  
camping in the sage-filled deserts of Colorado  
hiking the Appalachian Trail,  
ride the rapids on the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers,  
counting 48 eagles, those two days,  
ski the mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire  
watch my Labrador bounce through the waves at Cape Cod  
As Katherine Lee Bates writes in her famous hymn:  
America is beautiful!

I've seen, as you have, the power, the majesty, the beauty of our country -  
tectonic plates rising to breath-taking mountains,  
the raging of sea to shining sea,  
the magnificent eco-system of the forest,  
the seeming stark reality of the desert with incredible wildlife and flowers.  
100 years ago Katherine Lee Bates was on sabbatical from Wellesley College,  
and was teaching in Colorado Springs.

She writes this memory:

One day some of the other teachers and I decided to go on a trip to 14,000-foot Pikes Peak. We hired a prairie wagon. Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse.

Who can doubt that there is some mysterious, majestic mind  
designing the intricacies of the Universe.  
And we have only begun to see the things what God has designed and fulfilled,  
as they continue to evolve and change  
as a living testament to a living God.  
Not to mention the things that God  
is continuing to make possible, even in your own life,  
as we each continue to evolve and grow.  
I pray that you never cease to grow and evolve into a new being in Christ.

It is our responsibility as stewards, given the gift of Creation  
not to dominate, in some translations of Genesis 1,  
but to be stewards of God's creation,  
in our backyards, this our America, the Beautiful.

As an American, I make that pledge every time I engage one of my recreations.  
As I think about it, recreation, re-creation, and re-creating  
take on special significance.  
As I care for God's creation, I re-create myself in God's image,  
and find true recreation - the joy and fun of vacations, holidays or days off.

We join with Katherine Lee Bates in the awe of the amber waves of grain,  
and the purple mountains' majesty above the fruited plain.  
Pledge to make America more beautiful than we find her,  
and be good stewards of all of God's Creation,  
using only what we truly need, not want.

Let us pray:

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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