

“PRESERVING OUR UNION” WHY WE PRAY FOR OUR GOVERNMENT

Some significant milestones in our nation’s history are commemorated in January, including the recognition of our nation’s commitment to Civil Rights (Martin Luther King Jr. Day) and the annual commemoration of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision of January 22, 1973 legalizing abortion. No faithful Catholic (or person of good will) could deny the importance of creating a society in which **each person** is judged not by skin color but by his character. Nor do we judge entire countries based upon the ethnic makeup of its citizens. To do so is abhorrent. I am proud that our Catholic faith speaks with one voice on the issue of respect for all human life from the moment of conception. Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* teaches: “Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.” *GS* 29 § 2.

I have very limited experience in feeling that I was being treated differently because of who I am, how I look, or the clothes I wear. Yes, while trying to learn a new language in Italy in 2005, in a few stores I felt barely tolerated, yet another “foreigner” struggling to communicate. I suspected they were uttering a few choice words under their breath about troublesome tourists invading their cities. But I could never pretend to know what it feels like to be the recipient of discrimination solely based upon race. Our nation was founded to be a place where people of disparate backgrounds, ethnically and religiously, could come together in search of a dream. It is noteworthy that **George Washington** and **Martin Luther King Jr.** are the only two Americans whose birthdays are federal holidays.

As such, the third Monday of February is popularly known as President’s Day. Following **President George Washington’s** death in 1799, his **February 22 birthday** became a perennial day of remembrance. (Trivia alert—according to the Gregorian calendar his birth date was February 22, 1732, but that calendar was only adopted by England and its colonies **after** Washington was born. The Julian calendar has him born on February 11.) This holiday provides a prime opportunity to examine our collective consciences as a nation, begging strength from God to be the people He has created us to be. Formally established nationwide in 1885, (and still officially called “George Washington’s Birthday” by the federal government), President’s Day highlights the significant role our founders played in this great experiment we call America.

We ought to be careful in judging people of the late 18th century by today’s standards. Fully twelve U.S. Presidents were slave owners at some point during their lifetimes; some of them actually freed those same slaves, reflecting their own evolving opinions on this stain of our nation’s past. But it is dangerous to judge everyone by today’s standards, even as we must admit our historic faults. We are far from a perfect nation, and yet I would be hard pressed to think of another nation that has provided more opportunity for so many immigrants who became her citizens as these United States of America. We ought to instill in our young people a reasoned, realistic and measured patriotism, loyal to the principles of our nation’s founders. They espoused a form of government that provides clearly defined checks and balances upon the power of any one branch of the federal government, placing individual liberty at the center of the experiment.

Realizing the American experiment entailed much hardship and presumed acceptance of a set of unique values to which its citizens could agree. People had the right to worship (or not to worship) according to the dictates of their consciences, enjoyed unbridled freedom of movement and assurances against an intruding government. My great-grandfather arrived from Austria in the late 1870’s, and even changed his name from Karl to Charles and the spelling of his last name from Übl to Ubel, as part of the assimilation process. He was an American now. Those ideals remain in place, though I fear they are not instilled in our young citizens as they used to be. How many schools still recite the **Pledge of Allegiance**, first penned in 1892, and slightly modified twice over the succeeding generations? If President’s Day is merely a day to feel inconvenienced because we do not receive the U.S. Mail or find banks closed, what a sad commentary.

It is our fervent prayer that every person of good will may recognize the fundamental dignity of the human person, and work to truly create a society with liberty and justice for all, not just some. We echo the words of **Archbishop John Carroll**, who entrusted the citizens of this nation in 1791 to God’s “unbounded mercy... that

they may be blessed in the knowledge and sanctified in the observance of your most holy law.” To that end, I encourage you to pray for our President. This call for prayer is for the benefit of whomever is elected to this office. May he be guided by the prayers of the American people for his well-being and hear the cries of those calling attention to the most forgotten in our nation, evidenced by the many thousands who rallied for life at the U.S. Capitol and those millions who yearn to make their permanent home here. Our duty as citizens requires us to sound our voices. Our faith dictates that we do so respectfully and civilly.

- “Dude, where’s my medal?” After seeing a list of snowboarding events, I thought I tuned into the X-Games, not the Winter Olympics. “Slopestyle” and “Big Air,” are just two new events I can’t explain. It is part of a youth appeal movement. I’m guessing I do not exactly fit the demographic that the Olympic Games are trying to reach. Ever since **Franz Klammer’s** run for Gold in 1976, I find the downhill skiing event to be the most incredible 2 minutes in sports!
- Did you know that the **biathlon** is a civilian variant of an old 18th century Norwegian military exercise? It’s an odd combination of cross-country skiing and .22-caliber rifle target shooting. With each missed target, the skier tacks on a penalty lap. My school had target shooting as part of the JROTC curriculum. I only once recorded a bullseye (a perfect ten). “Great job, Ubel,” barked the instructor. “Thanks, Sarge” came my sheepish reply. You see, I had aimed at one target and hit another!
- **St. Josephine Bakhata**, whose feast we recently celebrated, was a 19th century woman from the Dufar region of Sudan. Kidnapped and sold into slavery for a period of twelve years, her treatment was positively cruel until she was sold to a family in Italy who utilized her as a nanny. She learned the Catholic faith through some sisters in Venice and obtained her freedom by court order and joined the sisters, living as a nun for 42 years as a cook and doorkeeper. She died on February 8, 1947 and was canonized on October 1, 2000.
- It is hard to believe that five years have passed since Pope Benedict XVI announced on 11 February 2013 his intention to resign from office. Beginning on 28 February 2013, he has lived a life of prayer almost entirely away from the public eye. May God continue to bless him in this his final chapter of a remarkable journey of faith.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector