

KEEPING THE REPUBLIC!

Two hundred fifty years ago on July 4, 1776 bells rang and people cheered to celebrate our Declaration of Independence. We have so much to be thankful for on this day. I am reminded of the response which is attributed to Benjamin Franklin at the close of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, when queried as he left Independence Hall on the final day of deliberation: "Dr. Franklin!" a lady queried, "Well, Doctor, what have we got? a republic or a monarchy?" "A republic!" replied the doctor, "if you can keep it."

How does an individual keep this great country a republic, when so much of what we are is a corporate entity? I should better ask, what does a Christian do to help keep this republic?

1. Know Christ personally.

Although salvation is the message of the church, the church does not save; only Christ saves. The salvation provided is personal. Christianity is not real until it is personal. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). The key is to believe in your own heart.

I shall evermore be thankful unto God for being reared in a Christian home, but I am also aware, God has no grandchildren. You are either a child of God or you are not. Mom can't save you, Dad cannot save you, and neither can preachers, teachers or well-meaning people. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again!" (John 3:7).

Franklin said at the Constitutional framing convention, "...God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid and favor?" We are in trouble if God is not guiding in the individual affairs of those men and women who make up our country.

Allow me to give you the exact words of our two most famous presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, their personal, documented testimonies.

From the personal prayers written by the hand of our first president himself: "Accept of me for the merits of Thy Son Jesus Christ...Cover my sins with that absolute obedience of Thy dear Son...for the sake of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered upon the cross for me. Direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the Lamb. And purge my heart by Thy Holy Spirit from the dross of my natural corruption. Increase my faith in the sweet promises of the Gospel. Thou gavest Thy Son to die for me...Pardon my sins for the sake of Thy Son, my only Saviour, Jesus Christ."

There is a fascinating letter that comes to us from an Illinois clergyman who talked to Lincoln some time after the Gettysburg Address. He questioned the president: "Mr. President, do you love Jesus?" After a long pause, Mr. Lincoln solemnly replied: "When I left Springfield I asked the people to pray for me. I was not a Christian. When I buried my son, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ. Yes, I do love Jesus" (from the Lincoln Museum, Washington D.C.; The Lincoln Memorial: Album-Immortelles in the O.H., Oldroyd Collection. Published in 1883, page 366).

2. Be moral and upright.

In our land today there is an obvious dearth of morality. I am appalled that political correctness should mean that we are tolerant of taking the life of the unborn, serial adulteries, rampant fornications and advocacy of same sex marriages.

In his farewell address, George Washington, our first president, advised his fellow citizens that "Religion and morality" were the "great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens." "National morality," he added, could not exist "in exclusion of religious principle." He went on to say, "Virtue or morality..." as the products of religion, were "...a necessary spring of popular government." What better place to teach the faith and morals than the church? The promise to the church is: "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The church is undergirded by the Word of God and if we do not place the Word in a place of importance, we are in serious trouble. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). When the Word of God is not our guideline for morality, we have no morals. We need a revival of the Word.

In Nehemiah 8:8 and 9 it says, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading...For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." After an absence of the Word of God, the people were overwhelmed with conviction at the words. This would be a great criterion that we should consider. God's people should come to the House of God, hear the Word and obey as God so convicts them. Then we should take the Word to the unbelieving and pray for their conversion as we go. The result would be the reviving of the saved and the saving of the lost. Placing what God says above our politicians, sociologists, psychobabbleists, and entertainers would change everything for good.

3. Pray for America.

Stephen Lynch in his article, History Reflection for 4th of July: How Prayer Underpinned American Independence wrote, "Prayer played an important role in

the American struggle for independence. The First Continental Congress (Sept. 5-Oct. 26, 1774), comprised of delegates from all the colonies except Georgia, met for the first time in September 1774. In a letter to his wife, John Adams described the spiritual backdrop as the colonies were about to launch the Revolutionary War for independence. 'When the Congress met, Mr. Cushing made a motion that it should be opened with prayer. It was opposed by Mr. Jay of New York and Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina because we were so divided in religious sentiments — some Episcopalians, some Quakers, some Anabaptists, some Presbyterians, and some Congregationalists — that we could not join in the same act of worship. Mr. Samuel Adams arose and said that he was no bigot, and could hear a prayer from any gentleman of piety and virtue who was at the same time a friend to his country. He moved that Mr. Duche, an Episcopal clergyman, might read prayers to Congress the next morning. The motion was seconded and passed in the affirmative.' Adams continued, 'Accordingly, next morning the Rev. Duche appeared with his Episcopal vestments and read the 85th Psalm. I never saw a greater effect produced upon an audience. It seemed as if heaven had ordained that psalm to be read on that morning. George Washington was kneeling there, alongside him Patrick Henry, James Madison, and John Hancock. By their side there stood, bowed in reverence, the Puritan patriots of New England, who at that moment had reason to believe that an armed soldiery was wasting their humble households. They prayed fervently for America, for Congress, for the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and especially for the town of Boston (whose port had been closed and in which British troops were being quartered). And who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to heaven for divine help. It was enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave, pacifist Quakers of Philadelphia.' Diverse as it was, the spirituality of the First Continental Congress gave the initial spiritual encouragement that was needed on the road to American independence. The First Continental Congress proved to be an inspiring example of the fraternal unity that can come through devout prayer."

May we follow our Founding Fathers on this birthday of our nation and find the common bond and promise that prayer brings. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14).

God bless America and help us keep the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.