Letter of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV on the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of the United States of America

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all Americans on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This semiquincentennial marks that defining moment in the history of the United States of America, July 4, 1776, that gave enduring voice to the ideals of liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness, justice and democratic self-government.

For two and a half centuries, generations of Americans have worked together to carry these principles forward — through sacrifice, service, innovation and civic participation. This anniversary stands as an invitation not only to celebrate the nation's remarkable journey, but also to reflect upon the responsibilities that the sons and daughters of this country bear to one another, and to the generations who will inherit the nation that is being shaped today.

Among the most cherished of these principles is religious freedom — the right of every person to worship according to conscience and to practice their faith openly, without coercion or fear. In marking this anniversary, it is important to recognize that freedom of religion has long been central to the American promise, protecting both individual dignity and the peaceful coexistence of a diverse people.

This same freedom has permitted the Catholic Church to take root and flourish within the United States, to the advantage not only of her own members, but of the entire nation. As faithful sons and daughters of the Church, Catholics are called to imbue every dimension of their existence with the charity of Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 5:14), living out the Gospel in the circumstances of daily life. Such a way of living has given rise to the many benefits that the Church has provided over the years to the development of this nation. In particular, I bring to mind her service in areas of education, the preferential care of the poor, healthcare and basic social services, to name a few.

In the Encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae,* my predecessor Pope Leo XIII wrote that "no better citizen is there... than the Christian who is mindful of his duty" (no. 7). In fact, faith — far from standing in opposition to the responsibilities of citizenship — lends new vigor to the pursuit of justice, peace and the common good, bringing to perfection every natural gift bestowed by the Creator. Saint Paul himself encouraged the early Christians to pray for those in positions of authority in order to live a peaceful life in accord with the will of God (cf. *1 Tim* 2:2). In this regard, it is in the faithful fulfilment of duty — to God and country — that Catholics are called to continue to serve the nation, as leaven for the growth of a civilization of love (cf. *Mt* 13:33).

Also among the principles that have guided the development of this country is the God-given dignity of every human life, each person being endowed with an inherent worth that calls for reverence,

protection and care. In this spirit, a full understanding of this dignity leads to recognizing the importance of safeguarding human life from its beginning at conception until natural death, and of building a society in which the vulnerable, the suffering and the forgotten are always met with compassion, solidarity and love.

Defending human life also includes welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants, whose hopes, sacrifices and contribution have formed part of the history of this country from its very beginning. In every generation, those who have arrived seeking freedom, opportunity and a place to belong have helped to shape the nation's character. To receive them with compassion and generosity is not only an act of charity, but also a recognition of the dignity that belongs to every human person.

In my recent Encyclical Letter, *Magnifica Humanitas*, I wrote about working together for the common good. "Building a world in which everyone can flourish requires shared responsibility and courage. No one can single-handedly bear the weight of the challenges the world is facing" (no. 13). We need one another, and we need to work together in unity to confront the challenges that the world is facing today.

May this milestone renew the shared commitment to the promise of freedom, justice, opportunity and democracy. May Americans honor the courage and vision of those who came before them by strengthening their communities, respecting their differences and working together toward a more perfect union.

Congratulations on this extraordinary national anniversary. May the spirit of 1776 continue to inspire hope and unity as the United States of America moves into the future. In assuring all of you of my prayers in your renewed efforts to strengthen the nation in the principles that guided its Founding Fathers, I entrust you to the intercession of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of this country, that she will continue to watch over America and protect all who dwell therein.

From the Vatican, June 25, 2026

Leo PP. XIV