

# India Needs the Brave

“Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to freedom and life. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance.”

74 years ago, in a packed Delhi Assembly Hall, a 5 feet 8 tall man stood up and spoke. In his words resonated the optimism of an entire nation. As the echoes of the twelfth stroke fell, a conch shell's bleat reverberated through the halls, heralding the birth of a new nation – India.

Good morning everyone.

This is another August 15<sup>th</sup>. Every year, without fail, this day rolls by to remind us once again, what we fought for, the price we paid and what we gained on that fateful monsoon night – freedom. The before and after of August 15<sup>th</sup> 1947 is not unfamiliar to any of us. Men began to tread on this land as far back as 100,000 BC. We have remnants of Indus valley civilisation which dates back to 2500 BC. One of the largest civilizations of the time, it was ahead of even Mesopotamia and Egypt in many respects. We have always welcomed everyone- The Greeks, Arabs, Chinese, Portuguese... the men who came to the country assimilated well with the culture to the point that the cultural distinctions between them and the natives blurred and we became one. Our country had periods of peace and tranquillity interspersed with war and conquest. She stood up against some of the powerful conquerors – Alexander the great and Mongols, just to name a few. India is the birthplace of some of the world's largest religions. Her trade relations made her very mighty and wealthy. Then came the British. Unbeknownst to us, she drained us of everything and reduced us to an exporter of raw materials while she dumped her cheap industrial goods here. Under the cover of forging business relations, they slowly conquered us. If we look back at history, we can find that what acted as the prime reason for this complete subjugation was our disunity. The feudal society which persisted in India drew wedges between different sections of society. The primitive caste system classified men into the worthy and the unworthy, the filthy and the pure. What finally broke us free from the captivity of the British Empire was the resolve of a group of people united by one man in a loincloth to bridge all these gaps and make India one nation, and one people. It was the unity of the nation that finally brought her to the light of freedom.

But the story didn't end there, did it? Years of division on the lines of caste and religion had done its damage. An evident lack of belief that people of two faiths can coexist peacefully, tore this nation into two. That wound has not healed yet. Time and again, it breaks open and bleeds.

The thing about history is that it repeats. While we might not see another Nadir Shah or Tipu Sultan or Asoka or Samudra Gupta, while another nation may not again reign over us, we can always draw parallels with the past and the present-if not here, then somewhere else. So, learning from the past so as to not repeat the past mistakes is the wise thing to do.

Yes, India has broken free from the shackles of colonialism, thanks to the hundreds of thousands of brave freedom fighters who spent their blood, sweat and tears for the liberation of this nation. But, have we achieved true freedom is a different question altogether. It is ironic, that today we are celebrating this Independence day amidst a series of lockdowns, where we have to stop ourselves from standing a bit too close,

or shaking our hands as a friendly gesture. The entire world is cowering before a puny little organism, which has already claimed lakhs of lives. This is perhaps, the right time to take a step back and think about what it means to be truly free.

Venerable archbishop Fulton J Sheen has rightly defined the word freedom. he says, “freedom does not mean the right to do whatever we please, but rather to do as we ought.”

India as a free nation, bestowed upon us many fundamental, civic and natural rights, which are slowly being stripped away. This isn't a recent phenomenon. This has been long coming. It wasn't that many eons ago, that the life of Gauri Lankesh was taken away for speaking the truth. If there has been a surge in the number of anti-nationalists in the government records, it is not because many have turned against the motherland, but because many have decided to be the voice of the voiceless and stand up for truth. A few weeks ago, Fr. Stan Swami died in a hospital bed in Mumbai. In a room, with his legs bound to the bed rails, as if he was a fugitive, he drew his last breath and there was no one beside him, save for his Saviour. Political scapegoating is but one of the many evils that's plaguing the country. It is perhaps one of the most tangible evidence of what's happening, but it is not the lone cause or effect of lack of freedom. When we open our eyes to the realities around us, we can see the multitudes of citizens living at sub-par conditions. If my brother is unable to get good education, isn't he stripped of the right to live a dignified life? If my neighbour can't get proper healthcare, isn't it a violation of his freedom to live? The pyres that rose in Delhi in April is still a raw reminder. No society can truly be free when a large proportion of its population is deprived of their right to lead a dignified life whereby they can achieve their true potential. In that sense, we have a long road to go to freedom.

It is hard to be apolitical on the Independence Day. Even if we try to keep politics and religion apart, there is always a certain level of osmosis between the two. Without religion, politics become amoral. I do not think, we have to shy away from being political. St. Joan of Arc fought against the Turks, because she was political. And while being political, she knew she was doing the right thing. She was a warrior of Christ. St. Catherine of Sienna, a doctor of the church, was a very vociferous woman. She even played a major role in healing the great schism of west. Her influence at that time was phenomenal. Blessed Alberto Marvelli, who lived in Italy, was also a heroic warrior for Christ. He was active in the political scene of Italy. He served the poor throughout the Second World War, rescued many people from deportation during the Nazi occupation, risking his own life. He was respected even by the communists whom he criticised openly. He agreed to run in elections as a candidate for the Christian democrats, but was killed before it, when a van belonging to the armed forces struck him on a dark road. The people still voted for him even after his death. Such was that young man's bravery.

Today, as we celebrate our 75<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, I invite you to be political. The world needs brave Catholics who can take solid stances. Silence is not the virtue and nor is ambiguity the solution.

Charles dickens began his book, a tale of two cities like this, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

The world is indeed in a very confused state. It is developing by leaps and bounds but sadly sin is also abounding. There is growth and development in one end and utmost poverty in the other. There is joy and so is misery. The world is broken and it needs healing. It is only through this healing that it can experience joy and liberty. If God wills, many of us will be priests tomorrow, his consecrated. But if not, we will still be kingdom priests. As we go out into the world, let's make sure that as the disciples of Jesus and as His priests, we bring His peace and love to everyone we encounter. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

We have Jesus Christ with us. He has given us the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation. In this broken world, to bring peace and love, joy and freedom, all we have to do is to let Christ work through us. All we have to do is allow him to use us as His instruments of peace. Thus let's help bring everyone to the liberty of Christ.

I wish you all a very Happy Independence Day. An occasional peep into the past will help keep things in perspective but a deep look in to the future will keep our goals clear. Let this Independence Day be a reminder and a call for action.

Thank you.