

We Are Truly Blessed

Whenever I am on Route 20 in West Springfield, I go by Mittineague Congregational Church and I see their marquee that reads: “Want to get rich quick? Count your blessings!” It always reminds me to say a prayer of thanks for all we have been given. My thoughts turn to prayers we learned while growing up. Some of the prayers we knew as they were said in our home as our parents tried to do their part in our religious upbringing. As you well know, I went to Catholic school and our day was also filled with prayer. Of course, we prayed the “Grace Before Meals” which was “Bless us, O Lord, and thee thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.” When we came in from lunchtime recess we prayed the “Grace After Meals” which went, “We give thee thanks, Almighty God, for all thy benefits, which we have received, from thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.” This does not always bode well with my attention to driving, but you get the idea.

Today’s readings were not from the Lectionary today but chosen as they reflect the blessings of the land that we celebrate today on the 250th

celebration of our country. The reading from the Book of Numbers asks God to bless us and smile upon us. These sentiments were put into lyrics that we will sing today: "God shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea."

Bates, who tradition tells us wrote these lyrics on a train as she traveled across the country, also includes praise for

- Spacious skies
- Amber waves of grain
- Purple mountain majesties
- The fruited plain

She went on to write and praise God for

- Heroes in liberating strife for loved their country more than life
- May God thy gold refine
- Till all success be nobleness and every gain divine

Sister Miriam Therese of the Medical Missionary Sisters adapted lyrics to include

Indigenous and immigrant, our daughters and our sons:
O may we never rest content till all are truly one.
America! America! God grant that we may be
a sisterhood and brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

Bates continued to praise and thank God for

Patriot dreams that see beyond the years
Alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears

Sister Miriam adapted

How beautiful, sincere lament, the wisdom born of tears,
the courage called for to repent the bloodshed through the years.
America! America! God grant that we may be
a nation blessed with none oppressed, true land of liberty.

How beautiful, two continents, and islands in the sea
That dream of peace, nonviolence, all people living free.
Americas! Americas! God grant that we may be
a hemisphere where people here all live in harmony

My favorite verse or part of Bates, "America, the Beautiful" is when she asks God to "mend thine every flaw, confirm thy soul in self control, thy liberty in law."

If we paid heed to these words that are often sung, we recognize our own imperfections and our need to do something about them. I think as we work to unite the country and recognize that everyone truly belongs, regardless of race, color, culture, or creed, we will then be one. It is then that we will truly receive the blessings bestowed by God. I don't believe that God is holding them from us, but our human condition will not allow us to receive them or recognize them until we acknowledge our own weaknesses.

Today, we give thanks to God for our country, where people everywhere are free to worship in their churches, church halls, temples, mosques, and everywhere else they choose in a land founded on Freedom from Religion—meaning one particular religion. We choose our religion and we choose to follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who as the Son of God, lives and reigns with the Almighty and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. May our country unite, in spite and because of our differences, as we pray for peace and justice throughout the land in the next 250 years. May it be so. Amen.