



Independence Day: A Celebration of Freedom



by Jada Watson
Grade 8

As July 4 approaches, communities across the United States are preparing to celebrate Independence Day, the nation's annual commemoration of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. This federal holiday, also known as the Fourth of July, marks the historic moment when the Continental Congress declared the 13 American colonies free from British rule, setting the foundation for the United States as an independent nation.

As the United States approaches its 250th birthday, the Fourth of July remains a powerful symbol of national unity, resilience, and the enduring spirit of independence. These traditions, including past American culture, come from different countries and cities worldwide. Since then, we have grown from a collection of colonies into a powerful and diverse nation shaped by innovation, resilience, and the pursuit of liberty.

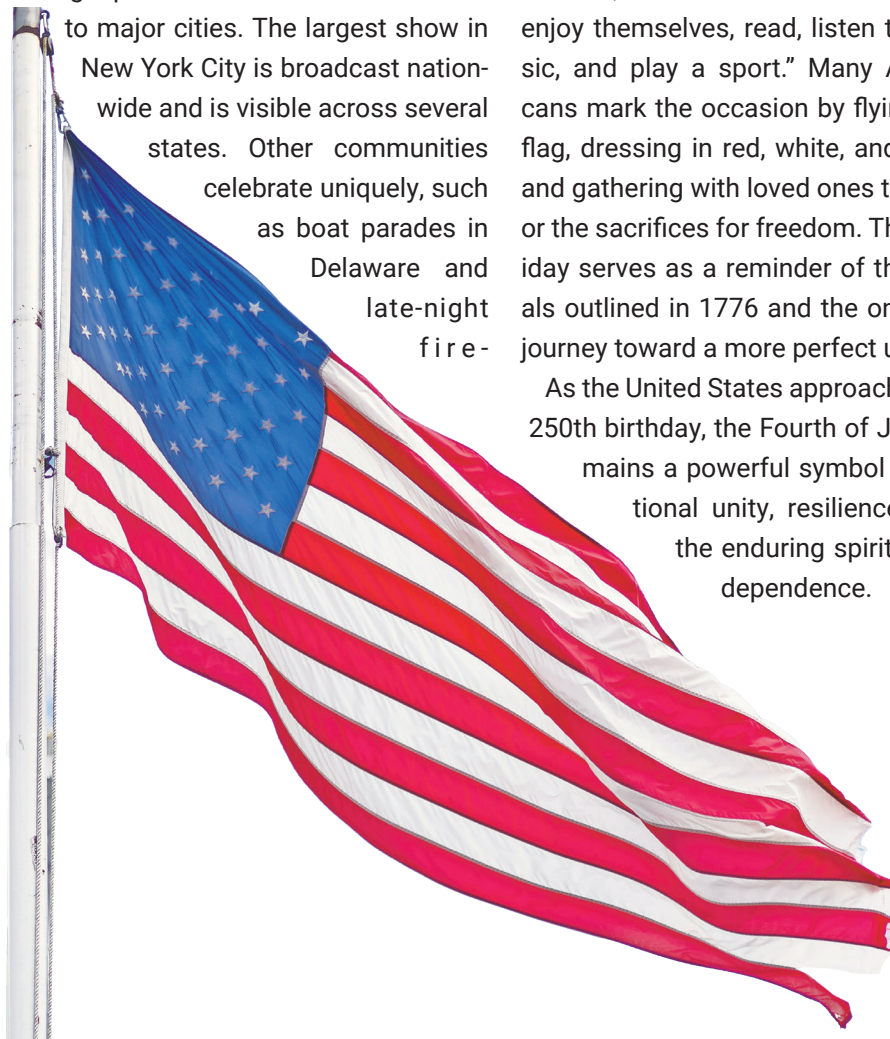
Every year in the United States, we celebrate Independence Day with fireworks and other traditions. Over the centuries, Independence Day has evolved into a vibrant dis-

play of national pride. Parades, concerts, family barbecues, and elaborate fireworks shows have become hallmarks of the holiday. Historical reenactments and the Declaration of Independence readings connect modern Americans with their revolutionary past in cities like Boston and Philadelphia. Fireworks, in particular, are a central tradition, with displays lighting up the skies from small towns to major cities. The largest show in New York City is broadcast nationwide and is visible across several states. Other communities celebrate uniquely, such as boat parades in Delaware and late-night fire-

works in Alaska, where long summer days delay the festivities until midnight.

Independence Day is a time for celebration and reflection on the nation's founding principles. Pope Francis said: "Together with a culture of work, there must be a culture of leisure as gratification. To put it another way: people who work must take the time to relax, to be with their families, to enjoy themselves, read, listen to music, and play a sport." Many Americans mark the occasion by flying the flag, dressing in red, white, and blue, and gathering with loved ones to honor the sacrifices for freedom. The holiday serves as a reminder of the ideals outlined in 1776 and the ongoing journey toward a more perfect union.

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CELEBRATION QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

This is the day that the LORD has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

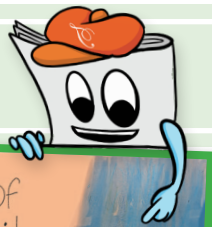
Psalms 118:24

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

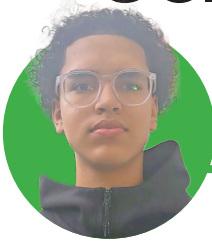
Philippians 4:4



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Celebrate Carnival



by Jose Frias
Grade 8

The Carnival from Brazil is celebrated every year, days before Ash Wednesday. This festival is celebrated to prepare for the solemnity of Lent. This is a national holiday in Brazil, during which business and governmental offices remain closed due to the chaos. This celebration is a vibrant and colorful celebration, full of energy. Carnival is a tourist attraction because not many cultures celebrate Lent like this. This

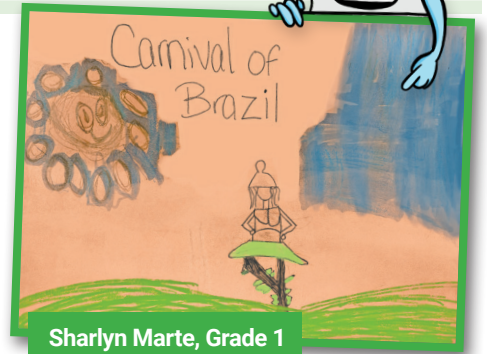
is one of Brazil's most unique celebrations. The Portuguese introduced this tradition around the 17th century, which impressed them with their chaotic street festival, which included water, flour, and more colorful ingredients thrown at participants.

Although this is a national holiday, it isn't only celebrated in the capital. Another popular place where this festival is held is in São Paulo. Also, Brazil's provinces have small celebrations, like Recife/Olinda.

This tradition is celebrated in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil. This celebration consists

of colorful and lively events. This street festival draws millions of people; people even travel to attend it, and colorful powder and water are thrown around. This celebration also traces back to Portuguese descendants, who use African and Brazilian musical styles. Along with the street festivals that go along the main pathway of the capital, they practice samba parades, which include costumes. The samba parade comes from the word Sambadrome, a dedicated stadium for this event.

Costumes for these parades are usually made by hand. Each province represents a group of many different places in the country. Each province usually has a colorway, although they



Sharlyn Marte, Grade 1

all coordinate many times. A popular color for costumes is yellow. Yellow symbolizes money and prosperity, and clothing is used during other holidays.

This popular festival attracts tourists and has a deep meaning, including a religious tradition. "I praise you for remembering me in everything and holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you."

1 Corinthians 11:2



ASK Sister Elizabeth



What is your celebration?

Hailey Ren, 8th Grade

Great question, Hailey. For me, life is the most precious gift I celebrate. I see how much God loves me when I go to bed and wake up alive and healthy every morning; for that, I'm grateful. I celebrate each day knowing I have been privileged to see another new day. And I do so through prayer and gratitude to God, the author of life, and then to others in my daily activities by simply

appreciating the image of God in those around me. Because life is a precious gift, I like celebrating my birthday. It is a time to come together to thank God and share the gift of food, gifts, dance, and memories with friends, families, and others. Each day is a gift from God, and only the living can celebrate. Make every day count for good and to the glory of God.

What is one celebration from your culture that you encourage others to learn about?

Jose Frias, 8th Grade

Hello Jose, thank you for asking about celebrations in my culture. I come from a rich cultural ethnic group called the Igbos in Nigeria. We are known for some unique cultural festivals. We love celebrating who we are and bringing joy to everyone around us with our traditional cultural dancing celebrations, unique food festivals, masquerades, displays in

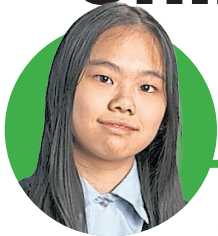
public places, and, of course, our belief in God as the creator of heaven and earth. One celebration from my culture that I would encourage people to learn is what we call the "New Yam Festival". This cultural celebration brings people together, particularly farmers, to appreciate God for the blessings of a bountiful harvest each year. This celebration thanks God, who makes the crops grow and provides food for us. The New Yam Festival celebration teaches us the lesson of gratitude for God's providence and to appreciate the dignity of human work. The celebration strengthens social ties and fosters community unity, cooperation, and solidarity. We are called to celebrate the success of our work while recognizing God's power in all we do.

Can you share a time when a celebration helped unite your parish community?

Jada Watson, 8th Grade

Wonderful question, Jada! I am happy to share a time when a celebration helped unite my parish community. I belong to a parish comprising different people with different languages, cultures, and traditions. The liturgical and spiritual program in my parish is made to grow the spirituality of the parishioners while building relationships with people of different cultures. One such celebration is called the "Annual Fall Festival". This celebration brings together the different cultures and people in the parish, displaying different cultural dresses, dance, food, music, games, and artwork. The sense of unity and understanding amongst the different cultures and people is strongly promoted and felt during this celebration in my parish. Jada, I look forward to inviting you to experience this beautiful celebration that helps unite my parish community.

Chinese New Year



by Hailey Ren
Grade 8

Chinese New Year is one of the most celebrated holidays in Chinese culture. This fifteen-day celebration marks the start of the lunar new year and is all about fresh beginnings, joyful traditions, and most importantly, family. This year, the festivities started on January 29th and wrapped up on February 12th, welcoming the wise Year of the Snake.

Every Chinese New Year falls between January 21st and February 20th, depending on the lunar calendar, which is based on the moon. Each year is represented by one of

the 12 zodiac animals, and people believe that the animal of their birth year can shape their personality and future. The snake zodiac sign, for example, is believed to be a symbol of intelligence.

Weeks before the celebration, families begin preparing. "We clean not just to tidy up," said Hepin, a 40 year old mom, "but to sweep away the bad luck from last year and make room for the good." After cleaning, the decorating begins. Homes are filled with red lanterns, paper cuttings, and lucky banners. Red is everywhere because it stands for happiness and good fortune, and it helps scare away bad spirits in Chinese culture.

Chinese New Year's Eve is one of the most important parts of this cele-

bration. Where families come together and celebrate. Kangdi, a 53-year-old dad, says, "The reunion dinner isn't just about the food. It's about everyone being together at the same table, even if we've been apart all year." The table is filled with dishes, each with a special meaning. Dumplings mean wealth, fish means abundance, rice cakes are for progress, and long noodles, known as longevity noodles, bring long life.

On Chinese New Year's Day, kids get red envelopes, called hongbao, from older relatives like aunts or uncles. They have money inside, but they're a way to send love and good luck. Nadia, an 18-year-old student, says, "My favorite part of Chinese New Year is the red envelopes. It's not the money that matters, it's the meaning behind the hongbao that truly matters." "My family likes to celebrate by eating

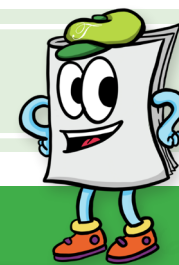
hotpot", says Changkun, a 12-year-old middle schooler, "I love all the meat and vegetables that are put into the broth, it feels like home."

The celebrations don't end on that day. The holiday continues for fifteen days. During those fifteen days, people will visit families and hold their celebrations. Chinese New Year ends with the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day. The lantern festival originated from the Han Dynasty where people would light up lanterns to show respect for Buddha. During the modern-day lantern festival, families celebrate by solving riddles, eating rice balls (tangyuan), and spending time together.



FOR
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Diocesan History Corner

by Joseph Coen

Our Lady of Velankanni

Around September 8th each year, the streets surrounding Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Queens Village are transformed into a bit of Tamil Nadu, India. A procession of women in colorful sarees carrying rose petals, a band of musical instruments, and a procession representing 12 different parish ethnic groups are followed by clergy and lay people carrying ceremonial umbrellas. Nine days of prayer, in the form of a novena, lead up to the celebration which is the reason for this transformation: The Feast of Our Lady of Velankanni. Each day of the novena the statue of Mary that will be carried in procession is dressed in a different saree donated by different members of the community.

According to tradition, Velankanni was the location of apparitions of the Blessed Mother in the 16th and 17th centuries. The first was to two peasant boys, one of whom was miraculously able to walk. The last was when sailors on a Portuguese merchant ship were saved from a storm. These miracles



Photo: Xavier Mareendran

are the reason why this apparition is also called Our Lady of Good Health.

The local celebration of the feast began in 2016 when Fr. Robert Ambalathingal brought a statue of Our Lady of Velankanni to Our Lady of Lourdes. That first celebration drew about 800 people, including those from other ethnic groups. The Mass for the feast is also multilingual and the procession is accompanied by a trilingual recitation of the rosary, making the feast an occasion when Mary brings together people from many languages and backgrounds as one family in faith.

Joseph Coen, C.A., is the archivist of the Diocese of Brooklyn.

FIND THE WORDS

CELEBRATE	FESTIVE
UNITY	GLOBAL
CONNECTION	JOY
CULTURE	RELIGION
DIVERSITY	TRADITIONS



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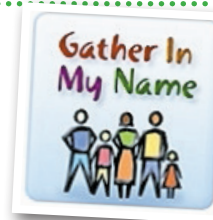
Habemus Papam!

Those words were shouted around the world on May 8 as everyone celebrated the election of a new pope. The celebrations increased when the world met Pope Leo XIV. Since early childhood, Pope Leo XIV was special, wanting to help others and often seeing the good in others. You are living in a time of the Catholic Church where our Pope advocates for the rights of the poor and working class. A couple of months ago, we would be talking about our dear Pope Francis and how he once said, "Human dignity is the same for all

human beings: when I trample on the dignity of another, I am trampling on my own."

Today, we celebrate our new pope, Pope Leo XIV. When he was in Peru, he delivered blankets to far away villages, helped save villagers during severe floods, to name a few. It's clear that he is carrying on Pope Francis' concern and care for the dignity of the poor and the worker.

Pope Leo XIV is also a strong supporter of the Catholic Social Teachings. One of the teachings is the "dignity and rights of the worker." Pope



SEE DIRECTIONS ONLINE:



teaching?

Use the QR code to learn more about Pope Leo XIV. With your family, plan a "Habemus Papam" party. Talk about why you would celebrate Pope Leo XIV. What are some of the places where Pope Leo lived? How do these areas celebrate happy events? Add these international festivities to your party.