

The Pursuit of Happiness



Fireworks, flags, picnics, parades and baseball games – all the makings of a Fourth of July celebration in the United States. Such celebration has its roots in faith, hope and hardship. The women and men of the 13 colonies struggled for independence from Great Britain, seeking a new way of being in the world based on God-given rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

In contemporary life, happiness is often understood in a personal way, for example when an individual feels satisfied about her or his life and work. But our forebears probably were referring to a more communal sense of happiness, a kind of civic or social happiness. This sense of happiness is also found in the Gospels, with which the colonists were surely familiar. In the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12) for example, we see that happiness (or “blessedness,” as the Greek is often translated) comes in relation to God and to others. Being

in right relationship with God and others is central to being happy. And, as in the experience of our ancestors, such happiness can arise through struggle and transformation that is both individual and communal.

What makes you happy? How is your happiness connected with the happiness of your family, your neighborhood, your professional or spiritual community? In what ways are you seeking to pursue happiness as an individual and as part of a world community?

-- Maxine Kollasch, IHM