



Dear Carmelites,

Today is the 15th of August, a very special day for all of us, as it is our Independence Day. We celebrate today as a beautiful reminder of how India got freedom from the British following a long struggle, in which millions of Indians fought and gave up their lives.

However, today, amidst our celebrations there is also a need to pause and reflect. Are we really free? If freedom means ridding ourselves of a conquering force, do we not have yet another 'enemy' we need to conquer and expel? We are in the midst of a raging pandemic and we need to reunite once again to defeat this virus, and the fear it has created. Ronald Reagan once said "We are never defeated unless we give up on God". This virus has shown us that nothing— not lofty achievements, not money, and certainly no amount of power— can save us. Only unity and compassion can be the answer to the problems that mankind faces today.

We know that India is the cradle of the human race, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great grandmother of tradition. Mankind's most valuable spiritual history is treasured and valued in the Indian beliefs and faith. Today, this age-old Indian ethos needs to be sanctified. Let us pledge to become responsible citizens of India, to come together, not only to defeat this virus but also to defeat the scourge of poverty, bigotry, intolerance, corruption and materialism—a materialism that ensures that while thousands of Indians live below the poverty line, some of the richest men in the world are also Indians. While we have enough for everybody's need, there isn't enough for everybody's greed. The virus is a wake-up call. It is time we also freed ourselves from materialistic bondage and stepped into an era where each and every Indian can live a decent and worthy life and breathe in the free air of prosperous India. If there is one thing that this pandemic has taught us, it is that life is precious and very fragile. Every single life matters. We have witnessed material possessions; wealth and power bend its knees in front of invisible forces of Nature.

Albert Camus once said that freedom is nothing but a chance to be better. Every Indian deserves a better life. Let a new India arise out of the peasant's cottage grasping the plough, out of the huts in which the cobblers and sweepers dwell; inside the hospitals in which angels are clad in white, in the schools where teachers are lighting the path of divine wisdom, in the labs and the research centres where miraculous cures are revealed to scientists, and most importantly in homes where parents become co-creators of loving and noble children.

As we go up through these dark times, let us not forget to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Let us look for and seek some positive reasons for gratitude. Let us understand the power of mercy and kindness. We have to keep each other in our thoughts and save our brothers and sisters, because only then can we save ourselves. Yes, let's take a vow to become responsible citizens of India and enter boldly and brightly into that new Heaven of freedom that Tagore spoke about. We cannot let the pain and suffering of our forefathers go waste. We cannot let the pain and suffering of these times go waste. Gandhiji got freedom through satyagraha & non violence and we will get it through cooperation, courage and by practicing the universal values of love and compassion. I wish you all success in our "Freedom Mission".

Happy Independence Day! Jai Hind!

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