A few weeks ago I stood at a favorite spot atop Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park in Maine. From there one looks over Bar Harbor and out over the Atlantic Ocean. Each time for me there is the sensation of seeing sailing ships coming to the harbor loaded with pilgrims from Europe overawed by the beauty of the place and alive with expectation of a new homeland and freedom from the oppression that had driven them to make the journey.

Today we celebrate the moment when those people, ancestors of most of us, finally drafted a Declaration of Independence, and a new nation began to exist. That was over two centuries ago, but that view from the mountain in Maine made it seem so short a time. That spot on Cadillac Mountain has become a place for me to wonder gratefully at what our forefathers had made the journey to find and what they saw in the independence they finally formally declared. I wonder, too, how well we have lived up to their dream and how well we are living out the freedom we have seen in the declaration they risked their lives to declare.

Celebrating Eucharist on this day of declared independence, we are given the opportunity to see everything in the light of the God who has given us life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In the timelessness of the Eucharist we can see our forefathers’ dream more clearly, as we can see, too, how well – or how poorly – we have lived in the freedom independence can provide. The divine creation, which the Book of Genesis tells us is this world in which we live, is the awesome sight that met the pilgrims. The independence they sought is grounded in the divine gift of life Genesis tells us God breathes into everyone.

It doesn’t hurt to call to mind the words we just heard: “the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” God placed humankind in a garden that can remind us of the beautiful place the pilgrims saw as they approached the harbor beneath Cadillac Mountain. “Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed.”

The wisdom of the Faith that brings us to this Eucharist reminds us that the Declaration of Independence is grounded in the creative love of the God who created all things – “the God in whom we live and move and have our being.” If our forebears were looking for a new nation in which to live, they could find success only when their dreams were kept in the context of the very real love of God. It is a
love that grounds all other loves; it is the love that grounds the relationships of one citizen to another – of each citizen to all citizens.

Maybe we haven’t kept our concepts as clear as we might to be able to celebrate today the heritage which is ours as a result of that declaration of independence. The freedom to care for one another, to see one another as created equal – equal because all are created in the love that brings us all into being. Tragically, that freedom today is seen more and more to be a so-called right simply to do as we please. Headlines can leave us reeling as we become aware of a violence that is being touted more and more as something which is akin to freedom of expression.

Maybe the headlines would be different if we could find ourselves and our world modelling life after St. Paul’s admonition: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another; if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.” Renewed freedom, true independence, is far more available in the context of Paul’s loving admonition than in a so-called right to do as one pleases.

Finally, Paul goes on: “And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms… with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The words of the Gospel become so practical this Fourth of July 2015 when we hear Jesus say to us and our world: “Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.” He then goes on to tell the parable of the citizen who didn’t share his abundant harvest with a hungry world but simply built bigger barns to hold it all and then died before he had even begun to enjoy a richness he would never know.

What is the gospel we offer our country and our world this Fourth of July? Where is the dream of our forebears fulfilled with the barns we have built in our day? How truly free is an independence that has forgotten the reason for its existence? Maybe it is not a bad idea to celebrate this Eucharist as we remember the view from Cadillac Mountain.