

America's independence is celebrated on July 4th. The year was 1776. Two years before that, the 1st Continental Congress met in September, 1774, to air their grievances regarding the world's most powerful monarch, Britain's King George III. If you recall, America was not only concerned about liberty from Britain; the Colonists had also rebelled from the dominance of the Church of England, and that of the Catholic Church. The colonies were divided by religious sentiments from Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Quakers, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Puritans, Lutherans and Catholics. Mr. Jay (1st Supreme Court Chief justice) and Mr. Rutledge from South Carolina opposed even a prayer at the meeting because of this diversity.

However, Reverend Jacob Duche, an Episcopal clergyman, offered a prayer after a motion for such. There was opposition to the prayer, but afterward the room melted, and even non-practicing Christians were moved. Mr. Samuel Adams (known as the Father of the American Revolution) stated that he was no bigot, and could hear a prayer from any gentleman of Piety and virtue. Later that same day, John Adams (1st Vice president of the United States) wrote to his wife Abigail, "It was enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave Pacific Quakers of Philadelphia." If you reflect upon this prayer, which contains part of Psalm 35, it was not extemporaneous. It has been recorded and preserved in the Library of Congress in its full text, and from the earliest days of the nation, such invocations have been addressed to assemblies. There have been attempts to purge references to prayer and God from our heritage ever since our founding. The 1st example of "In God We Trust" was printed on a 2-cent coin in 1864, and it now appears on all paper currency. In a challenge suit brought by Town of Greece v. Galloway in the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, this motto was upheld on our currency on August 28, 2018.

As you listen and reflect upon this prayer, think of the objectives of our wise forefathers, and the objectives of the citizens of America 244 years later.

First Prayer of the Continental Congress, 1774



The Prayer in the First Congress, A.D. 1774

O Lord our Heavenly Father, high and mighty King of kings, and Lord of lords, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers on earth and reignest with power supreme and uncontrolled over all the Kingdoms, Empires and Governments; look down in mercy, we beseech Thee, on these our American States, who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor and thrown themselves on Thy gracious protection, desiring to be henceforth dependent only on Thee. To Thee have they appealed for the righteousness of their cause; to Thee do they now look up for that countenance and support, which Thou alone canst give. Take them, therefore, Heavenly Father, under Thy nurturing care; give them wisdom in Council and valor in the field; defeat the malicious designs of our cruel adversaries; convince them of the unrighteousness of their Cause and if they persist in their sanguinary purposes, of own unerring justice, sounding in their hearts, constrain them to drop the weapons of war from their unnerved hands in the day of battle!

Be Thou present, O God of wisdom, and direct the councils of this honorable assembly; enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation. That the scene of blood may be speedily closed; that order, harmony and peace may be effectually restored, and truth and justice, religion and piety, prevail and flourish amongst the people. Preserve the health of their bodies and vigor of their minds; shower down on them and the millions they here represent, such temporal blessings as Thou seest expedient for them in this world and crown them with everlasting glory in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, Thy Son and our Savior.

Amen.

Reverend Jacob Duché
Rector of Christ Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
September 7, 1774, 9 o'clock a.m.