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Holiday weekend family traditions

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NCR Today

Readers will find more thoughtful sentiments on the meaning of July 4th in my essay in the current print edition of *NCR*, which the editors tell me will be posted online this weekend. But, there is a more proximate, if less profound, meaning to the holiday that fits nicely with the "pursuit of happiness" mentioned in the document dated on July 4, 1776. It has become a family tradition now for friends to visit us at our home in Connecticut and go to the Goodspeed Opera House.

The Goodspeed Opera House was built on the first centennial of America's birth, 1876. It has, in its history, served many purposes including service as a garage for the state highway department at one point. In 1963, it was re-opened as a theater dedicated to the American musical. Such Broadway sensations as "Annie" and "Man of La Mancha" and "Shenandoah" began their runs here before moving on to the Great White Way where they won best musical Tony Awards. Tomorrow night, we are going to see "42nd Street" and next week, "Camelot" opens. The theater is small so there is no such thing as a bad seat. Before the show, you can have a glass of wine in an ornate Victorian parlor or out on a balcony overlooking the Connecticut River. After the show, we drive to one of the shore towns for dinner.

Independence Day should not come and go without each of us doing something that is quintessentially American. It may be something as simple as a BBQ, America's most authentic cuisine. You can read a great American novel like *The Great Gatsby*. Or, just read the Declaration of Independence. Whatever you do, try and make a tradition out of it. Our country is not like other countries whose roots are in the mist of the Middle Ages and are rooted in blood relations. Our country has always been polyglot but it has also, since its inception in 1776, been dedicated to a set of abstract propositions about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The country is stronger when those common propositions are combined with familial and person traditions, when they are incarnated as it were.

We Catholics know something about inculturation and we should not be shy about sharing our insights with our fellow Americans. So, Happy Independence Day to one and all.

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