

4<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## Independent

**“Providence has not created mankind  
entirely independent or entirely free.”**

*Alexis de Tocqueville, De la Démocratie en Amérique*

It has been said that when you feed a dog, it thinks you're God. And when you feed a cat, it *knows* it's God. Such a line has obviously been coined by a dog-lover, or, at the very least, someone not enamoured by the apparent arrogance of cats. Or maybe cats exude such a quality of superiority – usually with a disdainful, feline look – that they give off the wrong signals. But the truth is, cats appear more independent than dogs. End of story!

I'm not a great cat lover. I can tolerate cats, and I appreciate people who appreciate cats. But cats are not for me. Though, here I pay tribute to the only cat who's ever shared our home, a beautiful little thing, called *Kola*. He belonged to my daughter, but we had to look after him when Kathryn went to college. And here's where independence came to the fore. *Kola* was an outdoor cat, only appearing at feeding time and to sleep by the fire. But he was always affectionate when he was around us. I cried when he had to be put down by the Vet, that's how much *Kola* got to me.

Independence is good, and we use our independence to good ends. We can make our own decisions, forge our career, choose where to stay, vote for whatever Party we like. So, independence, and all the freedoms that go with it, is good. But de Tocqueville is also right when he suggests that we are not *entirely* independent and free. For, despite our liberties, are we not bound together as one humanity? Do we not live in community? Are we not integrated with others on a daily basis?

When we exercise the independence we value, it cannot be good when we use it for selfish ends, or when personal attitudes or actions do damage to others. So, on what in the USA and elsewhere is celebrated as Independence Day, let us join with them and celebrate independence and freedom. But let us also celebrate community and partnership, and the bonds of love and mutuality in which we are pleased and fortunate to live.

### **A prayer for today**

*“Bind us together, Lord, bind us together,  
O, bind us together in love.” Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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