



July 2, 2026

Dear Friends,

Yes, I am old enough to remember the bicentennial celebration of the United States of America in 1976! In fact, it occurred in the same year that I graduated from elementary school. Now, as the USA approaches its 250-year anniversary, Scranton continues to show forth a resilient people and a nation still emerging.

When I moved to Scranton more than five years ago, I carved out a daily walking route that took me through the historic Scranton Iron Furnaces just beyond Fitzpatrick Field. I remember being moved by those moments of stillness, peering over the ledge into the silos and imagining the booming, back-breaking work being done by thousands of Scrantonians in the 19th century.

I learned during my early days in Scranton that, before iron rails and anthracite coal defined the local industry, there was a previous attempt to advance commerce in the Area by manufacturing wrought iron nails. I also read that the nails produced here often failed. They were brittle and broke easily. The venture to build up Northeastern PA nearly went from boom to bust but was saved when proprietors deftly ditched the nails for rails, giving way to something stronger and more enduring.

And yet, the thought of those nails lingers in my mind — an early failure at the root of a story about reinvention and strength.

We know that not all nails fail. In the saving death of Jesus, the nails held. They pierced both his hands and feet, bearing the full weight of suffering and sacrifice as the life of the world itself seemed to give way. However, something much greater was unfolding. What appeared to be the end was actually a beginning and what seemed to be defined by death was, in fact, transformed into life eternal.

Both stories, one industrial and one sacred, reflect the passage of hardship into something brighter and enduring. Each story reflects the truth of a people and perhaps a nation: that we are formed not only by what succeeds, but by how we endure and respond in the face of challenge. We are saved by grace, not by nationalism.

As we reflect upon America's 250th birthday through a local lens, what can we discover here in Scranton?

To begin with, our summer is already an active one. The great Big Boy train engine rolled into town a couple of weeks ago with much fanfare, drawing tens of thousands of onlookers. The city's downtown has "World Cup fever", with fans gathering for live entertainment and festive fun. Incoming first-year students have carried their hopes and dreams onto our campus for New Student Orientation and our summer schedule of camps and conferences is just revving up.

While our coal mines and iron furnaces have been quiet and cool for decades, hard work in our city and at our University has not gone away. It has simply taken on new forms inside classrooms, laboratories, hospitals and small businesses where another kind of labor, which calls for its own endurance and skill, has emerged.

These do not feel like separate moments but signs of life instead, continuing at a place still gathering, still welcoming, still becoming. We do not see a story of uninterrupted success but instead something more honest and human. We see a place and a country shaped by what breaks and by what holds.

On behalf of my Jesuit brothers, please accept my very best wishes and promise of prayers on this great anniversary of our nation. May the very best still lie ahead of us, for our nation and for our mission.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph G. Marina, S.J.
President