



**Fortnight for Freedom**  
***Homily Offered During Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction***  
**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**  
**Bishop of Sioux Falls**  
**Cathedral of Saint Joseph**  
**June 28, 2016**  
***Memorial of Saint Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr***

Saint Paul advised us to pray without ceasing. It is good advice always, but especially when we confront evil in the world and the threat to the stability of society which threatens the salvation of souls.

And so we Catholics in America pray without ceasing during this Fortnight for Freedom. It began last Tuesday on the Memorials of Saint Thomas More and Bishop Saint John Fisher both of whom were martyred for their courage and conscience to stand true to the faith despite the abusive power of the then-government.

It ends on the Fourth of July when we recall with pride our forefathers, who with courage and conscience, declared that “we are endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness<sup>1</sup>” which are now under attack by today’s government and others with power.

The fact is that independence from the tyranny of England was not achieved on that day. Rather a “declaration” was announced. Independence would not come for many years during which blood, sweat and tears were required. The witness of those brave men and women and their families over a vague concept of freedom is awesome to behold and rooted in belief in a higher power: “all men are endowed by their creator<sup>1</sup>”.

Over twenty years ago I gave a retreat on the topic: “Catholic *and* American: is it Possible?” The theme was to discuss the inevitable tensions that come from living the faith in a pluralistic society. The conclusion was the if we give to God what is God’s and give to Caesar what is Caesar’s we can be both good Catholics and good Americans.

That optimistic premise was based on the social teaching of the Church that, as believers, we are to participate in society and to encourage its institutions to seek the common good. The common good must be premised on the teaching of the inherent right to religious freedom which comes from God and which no government has the moral right to constrain. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution specifically protects that freedom by assuring rights to freedom of religion, speech and association and the prohibition of government interfering with the free exercise of our beliefs<sup>2</sup>.

Today I am less optimistic. It seems that government at many levels through law, regulation and innuendo is intent on preventing us from giving to God what is God's. Popular media and powerful persons press enforcement of secular errors that lead to sin. That is why we must stand up with courage and perseverance to defend life from conception to natural death, to assure the freedom of faith-based institutions and individuals to live the Truth we profess, and to be able to reach out to our brothers and sisters in need, including the physically-vulnerable, the innocent immigrant, and those who suffer from injustice without compromising our faith. Among the techniques that are being used to force faith-based citizens to stand down from standing up for our God-given rights are frivolous (but costly) lawsuits, onerous bureaucratic regulations, media ridicule, and harsh, personal confrontations. We must not allow them to wear us down.

Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami summarized the state of the religious freedom conflict better than I could. He spoke these words as he opened the Fortnight last week<sup>3</sup>:

“If anyone thinks that religious freedom is not under assault in our world today, or that our concerns are a bit overwrought, I would remind you of the ongoing genocide against Christians in the Middle East. . . . simply because they professed what Peter professed . . . that Jesus is the “Christ of God.”

“In the second decade of the 21st century, some 150,000 Christians are killed for their faith every year. Like St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, and like Saints Peter and Paul, St. John the Baptist and the first martyrs of Rome, whose feast days the Church observes during these last days of June, these modern-day martyrs are victims of despotism in its hardest and harshest form.

“Yet, in this country and in other liberal democracies, people of faith are being increasingly subjected to a soft despotism in which ridicule, ostracism, and denial of employment opportunities for advancement are being used to marginalize us. We see this when butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers are being put into the legal dock for refusing to renounce their religious beliefs.

“A new religious intolerance is being established in our country. We see this when Christian pastors are stalked and threatened for being “Christian” pastors, when social scientists are expelled from universities for having turned up “politically incorrect” facts, when charitable organizations and confessional schools are harassed if they take seriously their faith's moral precepts and require their employees to support their missions. We see this in the refusal of the Administration to accommodate Catholic institutions and businesses because of their conscientious objection to subsidizing contraception and abortions.

“Sometimes, we are told, “Keep your religion to yourself.” It is becoming almost the new conventional wisdom that religion is private. That faith is something to be practiced in the privacy of one's home, by consenting adults, at that. Religious faith is personal but it should never be “private.” And professing a religious faith should not make anybody a second-class citizen or worse. But to stand up for the rights of

conscience, could require us, as Jesus reminds (us) . . . “to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily.”

“The right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person. Religious freedom is the human right that guarantees all other rights . . . Yet,” (he concluded), “(E)ven in the face of a growing intolerance of religion, we must as Catholics give witness. To fail to do so would be to fail in the charity we owe our neighbor.”

Since we gathered last June what has happened that should give us even greater concern? Among them is that the State of California has adopted a law that encourages assisted suicide for just about any reason<sup>4</sup>. Canada has done so in an even more expansive way that essentially mandates cooperation with it<sup>5</sup>. Border creep ought to be a concern even here in South Dakota.

A Cardinal in Spain gave a lecture in his Cathedral on the Church teachings on life, human sexuality and natural law. He was reported to the authorities for so-called “hate speech.” Fortunately the charges were dismissed. However as we learned last year about God created marriage, it only takes five justices to shred time-honored understandings.

The executive branch of our government has fully adopted as national policy gender ideology to be enforced in the public schools, in the military and as mandatory clauses in federal contracts. Our Catholic institutions receive federal funding to support many important programs such as special education and school lunch. Can that continue?

The Supreme Court gave a temporary reprieve to the Little Sisters of the Poor but resolved none of the constitutional issues at stake. So we must continue to pray.

And stand up. The theme for this Fortnight for Freedom is Witnesses to Freedom. A witness stands up, proclaims with integrity and seeks by joy and conviction to invite others to turn away from evil and sin. And so must we be such witnesses. The truth is that we cannot rely on laws, legislatures, courts or government officials to preserve our freedom and protect our souls. It requires changing hearts one person at a time.

There is a moving scene in the movie “A Man for All Seasons” which is about the life of Saint Thomas More who was martyred for the faith because he would not give in to government pressure to violate his belief in unity with the Bishop of Rome. While in prison awaiting execution, he responds to his distraught daughter who urges him to sign a document and be freed. “But” he protests, “what would I say to God?” Saint Thomas then as only a father could, teaches an important lesson: “When a man takes an oath he holds himself in his hands like water. If he opens his hands he needs to find himself again.”

We have taken an oath through the waters of baptism to live the great commandments. Let us keep our hands closed in prayer knowing that Christ has already triumphed over sin and death, and boldly but lovingly stand up as witnesses to that Truth for others to see.

May Mary, the mother of life and of us all, and St. Joseph our patron watch over and guide us.

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1 – Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

2 – Constitution of the United States, [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

3 – Mass Homily, Most Reverend Thomas Wenski, Archbishop of Miami, June 19, 2016

4 – <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-sac-guidelines-california-assisted-suicide-law-20160120-story.html>

5 - [http://www.finalexitnetwork.org/Canada\\_Supreme\\_Court\\_decision\\_of\\_2-6-15\\_assisted\\_dying\\_.pdf](http://www.finalexitnetwork.org/Canada_Supreme_Court_decision_of_2-6-15_assisted_dying_.pdf)

