



Fortnight for Freedom
Homily Offered During Eucharistic Adoration and
Benediction

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“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands by the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of scoffers – the law of the Lord is his joy.”¹ These words from the first of the Psalms captures I think the essence of our call to be faithful disciples of Christ.

I am not a Scripture scholar and do not know why this is the first of the psalms, but scripture, having been inspired, surely it is raised up as the first psalm to get our attention. The law of the Lord must be our priority, our guide and our goal, and when it is, joy can be ours. The law of the Lord is reflected in Jesus Christ, God and man.

This first song of the psalmist makes clear that life is not simply happenings we endure. It declares that God in his love has given us freedom to accept his love or reject it. We have the freedom to choose, and we will be held accountable for our choices. We have the freedom to choose good over evil, love over hate, virtue over sin, life over death. Yet once that choice is made we must be able to live it. That is why we gather along with Catholics and many others throughout the United States this day to defend our ability to actively live out our faith in Christ reflected in our moral choices.

We are in the midst of the second Fortnight for Freedom which we bishops have raised up to underscore the need for us to stand up to defend religious liberty and freedom of conscience. While we must be respectful of human institutions such as the three branches of our government, we must be careful that we do not stand in the way of sinners, way meaning living in the manner that they do. We must be alert that we do not sit in the company of scoffers at the law of the Lord just to get along, or to be well received, or to enjoy worldly benefits they offer.

Thursday we will celebrate Independence Day, the 4th of July. Independence from the tyranny of England was not achieved on that day. Rather a “declaration” was announced. Those who made the declaration did so with great courage; they did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, but stood up at great personal risk to be liberated from government tyranny. The witness of those brave men and women and their families over an inherent concept of freedom, the natural law, is awesome to recall for it is rooted in belief in a higher power. As they stated it: “all men are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”²

The boldness of that declaration reminds us that in the challenges of our day we are not to simply seek to protect our turf and circle the wagons. That would be standing by the side with the sinners and scoffers. Our call and our cause is the law of the Lord written in the hearts of all people. Faith lived strengthens society and respect for one another, for all persons are gifted by God with life. It is therefore important for us to remind ourselves that this is not simply a Catholic concern. It is also not simply the stuff of partisan politics. I saw a bumper sticker yesterday that said “God is not a Republican or a Democrat.” This is truly a matter of human rights and justice.

The First Amendment to the US Constitution specifically protects our right to choose the law of the Lord and live it by assuring rights for all peoples to freedom of religion, speech and association and it prohibits any government from interfering with the free exercise of our beliefs.

The fact is that there are specific threats to religious liberty immediately before us. Certainly the most prominent is the HHS mandate to force Catholic and other institutions and individuals to provide for sterilization, contraception and abortion-inducing drugs against our beliefs. Surely this mandate, if it stands, will be expanded to include abortion. Threats are also present affecting Catholic foster care and adoption services, outreach to immigrants in sacrament and charity, Catholic humanitarian services such as reaching out to victims of human trafficking, and access of Christian students to campus facilities. Just recently a Catholic school in another state lost a jury trial and is now directed to pay over \$100,000 in damages to a teacher who was let go because she was not living the Catholic moral standards as she agreed to do in her signed contract³. The White House has threatened to veto the entire military appropriations bill because it contains this clause: “the armed forces shall accommodate the beliefs, actions and speech,” that reflect the, “conscience, moral principles and religious beliefs of its members except in the case of military necessity⁴.” Soon to be tested is whether Catholic military and hospital chaplains will be able to minister without violating moral teachings. I would not be surprised if soon someone will try to force a city like St. Paul to change its name because the word saint is deemed offensive.

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 all our brothers and sisters in need, including the physically vulnerable, the innocent immigrant and those who suffer from injustice without compromising our faith. That is what disciples of Christ are called to do.

Among the techniques that have been used effectively to encourage us to stand down from standing up for our God given rights are lawsuits, regulations, ridicule, and personal confrontations which seek to wear us down. However, we must not do so. Rather we must not give in, we must remain vigilant, and we must remain vocal.

You, the laity, must take the lead in this grand endeavor for that is your mission as Vatican Council II set forth. Archbishop Charles Chaput recently said:

The secular world is the place where laypeople exercise their leadership most naturally. It's the environment of their everyday lives and their primary mission field. Bishops can counsel and teach but their role in practical political affairs like the fight for religious liberty can only be indirect and secondary. If lay people don't love their Catholic faith enough to struggle for it in the public square, nothing the bishops do will finally matter.⁵

In this Fortnight for Freedom let us recommit, each in our appropriate way, to have the courage of our convictions as did those who declared national independence. Let us declare our religious independence from those forces that seek to deny us our human right to religious liberty and to actively live what we know to be the truth. We can do so by prayer as we do tonight, by engagement in the political and legal process which is especially a ministry for the laity, and by proudly reaffirming our God given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as God defines them. We must do so for the generations to come. We must do so because the Church calls us to faithful citizenship. But most fully we must do so because we seek to be faithful disciples of Christ whose joy comes from the law of the Lord.

May Our Lady and St. Joseph watch over us.

¹ – Psalm 1:1-2

² – Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

³ – “Jury Finds for Catholic School Teacher Fired for Artificial Insemination Pregnancy”, Associated Press, June 3, 2013

⁴ – “Statement of Administration Policy, H.R. 1960 – National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2014,” June 11, 2013

⁵ – “Religious Liberty Depends on Lay Faithful, Not Bishops”, National Catholic Register, June 19, 2013

