



Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty

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Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman

June 3, 2015

My brother bishops,

As the [*Fortnight for Freedom: Freedom to Bear Witness*](#) draws ever nearer, please allow me to provide additional materials to assist your diocesan priests and staff in celebrating the Fortnight. Sample homily helps for the two Sundays of the Fortnight (June 21 and June 28) have been prepared and are attached to this letter on Bishops Only. (The Fortnight sample homilies will also be provided to diocesan staff via memoranda from staff at the Bishops' Conference.)

You will see that the homily helps explicitly make the connection to international religious freedom issues throughout, as our brothers and sisters abroad have made heroic sacrifices in the face of persecution in attempting to bear witness to the Gospel. These homily helps and scripture references are in line with a recent effort by the Italian Episcopal Conference, which you may recall from a [recent posting](#) on the Bishops Only website, to urge bishops around the world to pray on the Vigil of Pentecost for our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East.

Also, please see our Fortnight promotional **video**, which highlights how the Church bears witness to Christ: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wcj4cBJo1qQ> Please feel free to share the video and other materials on social media. The video will also be made available in Spanish very shortly on the [USCCB YouTube page](#). The Fortnight website (www.Fortnight4Freedom.org) showcases this video and will be updated with *additional* religious freedom video content in the coming weeks.

I am also pleased to provide a document containing [quotes from Pope Francis on religious freedom](#). These may be helpful for the Fortnight and beyond.

A number of materials have already been provided on Bishops Only as well as to diocesan directors, such as a [Parish Guide to celebrating the Fortnight](#), a [14-Day Study Guide on Dignitatis Humanae](#), a [Litany for Liberty](#), a series of examples of [Current Threats to Religious Liberty in the U.S.](#), a series of examples of [International Religious Freedom](#) issues, sample [Prayers of the Faithful](#), a [Holy Hour Template](#), and [Frequently Asked Questions about Religious Liberty](#). Fortnight 2015 talking points and daily Mass homily helps have also been provided on Bishops Only and to diocesan staff.

We have already heard from a number of dioceses about Fortnight events being planned. Once again, Conference staff is posting ideas from various dioceses on the Fortnight [Diocesan Activities](#) page. I would like to take this opportunity to point out the excellent work being done in the Diocese of Rockville Centre in conjunction with a lay-led group called [Catholics for Freedom of Religion](#). They have prepared materials for Catholic students in public schools who seek to bear witness to the faith in accordance with their constitutional rights. I am pleased to share the enclosed memorandum from

Bishop William Murphy of Rockville Center, transmitting those additional resources from the local level.

Finally, any diocesan staff with questions about the Fortnight should call or email Hillary Byrnes, lead staff to the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, at 202-541-3454 or hbyrnes@uscgb.org.

Let us pray that the 2015 Fortnight for Freedom leads to an increasing respect for and appreciation of religious freedom and bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel!

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty

Enclosures

Fortnight for Freedom 2015 – Suggested Sunday Homily Helps¹

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 21, 2015

Readings: **Job 38:1, 8-11**
 Psalm 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31
 2 Corinthians 5:14-17
 Mark 4:35-41

First Reading

- Today, from the Book of Job, we heard the Lord’s reply to Job’s questioning. Scripture says that God addressed Job “out of the storm.” Don’t we sometimes feel as if we are in the storm as well?
- God does not immediately give Job comfort, but rather reminds Job of *Who God is*.
- As the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom with the theme “Freedom to Bear Witness,” we reflect on who God is and what our responsibility is toward Him. In the midst of the storms in our own society, we are mindful of the Lord’s words to Job that it is the Lord who “shut within doors the sea.” In other words, God is God and no other – including the government. Our allegiance is to God as we bear witness to the truth about marriage as the union of one man and one woman; the truth about the dignity of all human life from conception to natural death; the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; and the truth about the need to protect and preserve our first freedom – religious liberty.

Responsorial Psalm

- Our Psalm reminds us to give thanks to the Lord at all times.
- In the “storm wind” that we will undoubtedly experience in life, we call upon the Lord in our distress. It is the Lord, says the psalmist, who will hush “the storm to a gentle breeze.”
- Today, the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom, with the theme being “Freedom to Bear Witness.” As we reflect on the state of religious freedom throughout the world with Christians in Syria, Iraq, Africa, and elsewhere being exiled from their homes and brutally martyred, we pray that the Lord calm these storm winds of persecution.

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Second Reading

- In the second reading, we are reminded of our responsibility to live a life in Christ: “so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” We are, therefore, called to be witnesses of Jesus.
- If we live for Christ, truly, then we have nothing to fear. Today, the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the “Freedom to Bear Witness.” The English word “martyr” originates from a Greek word meaning “witness.” During these times, we are mindful of the many Christians being martyred in Syria, Iraq, Africa and elsewhere in the world. These courageous brothers and sisters of ours are certainly “no longer liv[ing] for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” These Christians are living and dying for Jesus.
- St. Paul says that “whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” We are no longer the scared disciples in the upper room; we have received the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Jesus in the world. We are called, therefore, to exercise our “Freedom to Bear Witness” and stand in solidarity with Christians throughout the world.
- We can stand with other persecuted Christians, when we are willing to be persecuted for bearing witness to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman; to the truth that the intentional taking of unborn human life is murder; to the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; and to the truth that religious liberty in our country is under assault. We have many opportunities to “no longer live for [ourselves] but for him who for [our] sake died and was raised” – to live for Jesus the Lord.

Gospel

- Picture the boat being tossed on the waves, and a man asleep in the stern. Only a person without fear could be asleep at such a time. In the midst of the violent storm, the disciples were not abandoned – Jesus, calmly and fearlessly, remained with them.
- That boat can very well be the Church in our world today, being tossed about by the storms of persecution. Christians are being martyred in Syria, Iraq, Africa, and other parts of the world. In faith, we are called to stand with these brothers and sisters of ours.
- This Sunday, the Church in the United States begins the Fortnight for Freedom, with the theme being “Freedom to Bear Witness.” In the midst of the storm of assaults on marriage as the union of one man and one woman; on the unborn; on the poor, the sick, and migrants; and on our religious liberty, Jesus asks us the questions he posed in today’s Gospel: “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?”
- Rather than cowering to terror – to the fear of being marginalized, socially shunned, publicly ridiculed – we instead demonstrate our faith by defending true marriage, the unborn, the poor, the elderly, and religious liberty. In doing so, we stand in solidarity with Christians around the world who have sacrificed so much more, including all of their property and their very lives.
- We know that in the end, the King of kings and Lord of lords – Jesus Christ – will command the storm to “Quiet! Be still!”

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 28, 2015

Readings: **Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24**
 Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13
 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15
 Mark 5:21-43

First Reading

- In the first reading, we are reminded that God did not make death. Rather, he came that we might have life.
- We know that in creation, life and freedom are inextricably linked. God created man and woman, blessed them, gave them all that they needed; and gave them freedom to love. In creating us in His own image, God desired that we be free as he is free.
- The only thing that can truly hamper our God-given freedom is sin, which leads to death. As the reading from the Book of Wisdom says, “by the envy of the devil, death entered the world.” It was not God’s will that we suffer – “God did not make death” – but that we follow him.
- The Catholic Church in the United States is currently celebrating the Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the “Freedom to Bear Witness” – to marriage as the union of one man and one woman, to the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, to the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant, and to religious freedom to live one’s faith in public life. Importantly, we recall that our freedom does not come from this world, but from the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm

- The Psalm continues on the theme of God saving us from our enemies and from the “netherworld.” God is our rescuer. We pray that God would rescue our Christian brothers and sisters around the world from the persecution that many face every day.
- Today in particular we echo the psalmist in praying that God will “not let [our] enemies rejoice over [us]” and that he “turn [our] mourning into dancing.”
- As the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates the Fortnight for Freedom, with the theme being “Freedom to Bear Witness,” we pray that God not let our enemies rejoice over us as we bear witness to the dignity of all human life, to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, to the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant, and to our first freedom – religious liberty.

Second Reading

- In the second reading, we heard: “your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality.” For years, we have enjoyed freedom of religion in our country. We have had an abundance, and through our abundance I hope we supplied for others’ material needs. But in another sense, those who have been suffering the lack of religious freedom around the world have shown an abundance of something else: faith and trust. We need this today.
- I am sure you are aware of the intense religious persecution that Christians are undergoing in the Middle East and parts of Africa. We should be mindful of these

Christians as the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates the Fortnight for Freedom.

- Please pray for our brothers and sisters who are undergoing suffering for the name of Jesus.
- We owe it to them to stand up for the religious freedom that we have enjoyed in this country, so that we may continue to show the world that it is possible to respect the consciences of people and live together in peace.
- If we are afraid of being marginalized, think about the Christians in Syria, Iraq, and Africa who have been brutally martyred and others who have been exiled from their homelands. If we hesitate to say that we are pro-life, for man/woman marriage, for the poor, for the migrant, and for religious liberty in conversations with others, think about the Christians who have been kidnapped and killed by Boko Haram and ISIS. Stand up for them by standing up for the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Church.

Gospel

- In the Gospel today we have two stories of healing linked forever by Christ's intervention. At the beginning, we meet Jairus and hear about his daughter. As Jesus goes with Jairus to his house, we meet the woman suffering from hemorrhages.
 - Jairus, a synagogue official, goes directly to Jesus to ask him for something. The woman, in contrast, tells herself that she only needs to touch Christ's cloak to be healed. Both, in their own way, demonstrate faith.
 - Jesus, however, by his actions, publicly reveals the woman's faith. Thus, Jairus's faith and the woman's faith are publicly known.
- Jesus wants our faith to be publicly known. As the Church in the United States celebrates the Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the "Freedom to Bear Witness," we are reminded to make our faith in Christ and our membership in his Church publicly known.
- As we pray for the "Freedom to Bear Witness," we pray for the courage to witness boldly to the Truth, which is to bear witness to Jesus Christ who is the personification of all truth.
- May we publicly bear witness to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman; the truth that intentionally taking an unborn life is murder; the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; the truth that religious liberty around the world is under attack, as Christians are being exiled from their lands and brutally martyred; and the truth that when we stand for our religious liberties in this country, we are standing in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.
- When we publicly exercise our "Freedom to Bear Witness," we will be ridiculed. Jesus in today's Gospel was also ridiculed, and we are mindful of his words elsewhere in the Gospel where our Lord says, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:20) and "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first" (Jn 15:18). We can certainly take consolation in today's words of our Lord: "Do not be afraid; just have faith."



- “[A] healthy pluralism...does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques.” - [Evangelii Gaudium](#) (“The Joy of the Gospel”), no. 255
- “Religious freedom is not only that of private thought or worship. It is the liberty to live, both privately and publicly, according to the ethical principles resulting from found truth.” - [June 20, 2014](#)
- “We must promote religious liberty for all people. Every man and woman must be free to profess his or her faith, whatever it may be. Why? Because that man and that woman are children of God.” - [May 20, 2013](#)
- “I cannot fail to recall the many instances of injustice and persecution which daily afflict religious minorities, and Christians in particular, in various parts of our world. Communities and individuals today find themselves subjected to barbaric acts of violence: they are evicted from their homes and native lands, sold as slaves, killed, beheaded, crucified or burned alive, under the shameful and complicit silence of so many.” - [Nov. 25, 2014](#)
- “Dear brothers and sisters who courageously bear witness to Jesus in the land blessed by the Lord, our consolation and our hope is Christ himself. I encourage you, then, to remain close to him, like branches on the vine, in the certainty that no tribulation, distress or persecution can separate us from him (cf. *Rom* 8:35). May the trials which you are presently enduring strengthen the faith and the fidelity of each and all of you!” - [Dec. 21, 2014](#)
- “When, in the name of an ideology, there is an attempt to remove God from society, it ends up adoring idols, and very soon men and women lose their way, their dignity is trampled and their rights violated.” - [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “We cannot deny that intolerance towards those with different religious convictions is a particularly insidious enemy, one which today is being witnessed in various areas around the world. All believers must be particularly vigilant so that, in living out with conviction our religious and ethical code, we may always express the mystery we intend to honour.” - [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “Authentic religion is a source of peace and not of violence! No one must use the name of God to commit violence! To kill in the name of God is a grave sacrilege. To discriminate in the name of God is inhuman.” - [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “Whenever adherence to a specific religious tradition gives birth to service that shows conviction, generosity and concern for the whole of society without making distinctions, then there too exists an authentic and mature living out of religious freedom... The more men and women are at the service of others, the greater their freedom!” - [Sept. 23, 2014](#)
- “We must not be afraid of being Christian and living as Christians! We must have this courage to go and proclaim the Risen Christ, for he is our peace; he made peace with his love, with his forgiveness, with his blood and with his mercy.” - [Apr. 7, 2013](#)
- “What does freedom mean? It is certainly not doing whatever you want, allowing yourself to be dominated by the passions, to pass from one experience to another without discernment, to follow the fashions of the day; freedom does not mean, so to speak, throwing everything that you don't like out the window... Let us not be afraid of life

commitments, commitments that take up and concern our entire life! In this way our life will be fruitful! And this is freedom: to have the courage to make these decisions with generosity.” - [May 4, 2013](#)

- “In today’s world, religious freedom is more often affirmed than put into practice.” Defending religious liberty “guarantees the growth and development of the entire community.” - [June 8, 2013](#)
- “Marriage and the family are in crisis today. We now live in a culture of the temporary, in which more and more people reject marriage as a public obligation. This revolution of customs and morals has often waved ‘the flag of freedom’, but it has, in reality, brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.” - [Nov. 17, 2014](#)
- “In the end, what kind of dignity is there without the possibility of freely expressing one’s thought or professing one’s religious faith? What dignity can there be without a clear juridical framework which limits the rule of force and enables the rule of law to prevail over the power of tyranny? What dignity can men and women ever enjoy if they are subjected to all types of discrimination?” – [Nov. 25, 2014](#)
- “Nor, in writing to you, can I remain silent about the members of other religious and ethnic groups who are also experiencing persecution and the effects of these conflicts. Every day I follow the new reports of the enormous suffering endured by many people in the Middle East. I think in particular of the children, the young mothers, the elderly, the homeless and all refugees, the starving and those facing the prospect of a hard winter without an adequate shelter. This suffering cries out to God and it calls for our commitment to prayer and concrete efforts to help in any way possible. I want to express to all of you my personal closeness and solidarity, as well as that of the whole Church, and to offer you a word of consolation and hope.” - [Dec. 21, 2014](#)
- “The tragic situation faced by our Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq, as well as by the Yazidi and members of other religious and ethnic communities, demands that all religious leaders clearly speak out to condemn these crimes unanimously and unambiguously, and to denounce the practice of invoking religion in order to justify them.” - [Dec. 21, 2014](#)
- “Today the Churches and ecclesial communities in Europe find themselves facing new and decisive challenges, which can only be answered effectively by speaking with one voice. I am thinking, for example, of the challenge posed by legislators who, in the name of some badly interpreted principle of tolerance, end up preventing citizens from freely expressing and practicing their own religious convictions in a peaceful and legitimate way.” - [May 7, 2015](#)

★ JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2015 ★
FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM **FREEDOM TO BEAR WITNESS**
FORTNIGHT4FREEDOM★ORG

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- As we pray for the "Freedom to Bear Witness," we pray for the courage to witness boldly to the Truth, which is to bear witness to Jesus Christ who is the personification of all truth.
- May we publicly bear witness to the truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman; the truth that intentionally taking an unborn life is murder; the truth about the need to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the migrant; the truth that religious liberty around the world is under attack, as Christians are being exiled from their lands and brutally martyred; and the truth that when we stand for our religious liberties in this country, we are standing in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.
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DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 31, 2015

Your Eminence/Excellency:

Catholics for Freedom of Religion is a grass roots organization which has developed in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. In a few short years the organization has grown and is now present in other dioceses throughout the country.

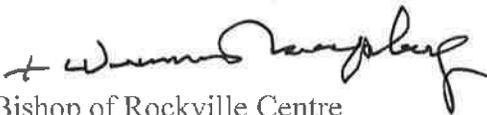
For the past two years the group has reached out to our children, particularly those in public school, in order to educate them as to their rights about religious expression in our public schools.

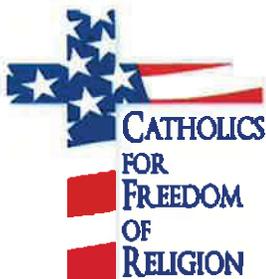
In preparation for our "Fortnight For Freedom" gathering in June, our catechetical leaders are conducting a contest in our Confirmation preparation programs and Catholic Schools. Children from grades 4 – 12 are asked to enter an art contest while those in 7th and 8th grades are asked to write an essay. Winners of the contest participate in our "Fortnight for Freedom" celebration. Having witnessed some of the winners in last year's event I can assure you that the young people learned what it means to have religious freedom here in America.

Thanks to its success we now have a lesson in our Confirmation programs which has as its focus "Freedom of Religion". Material for the various events and lesson plans can be found on our Faith Formation website:

<http://www.drvc-faith.org/2015/04/religious-liberty/#.VS1oRtzF-ao>

Fraternally yours in Christ,


Bishop of Rockville Centre



March 19, 2015

Dear Bishop Murphy,

In light of the upcoming "Fortnight For Freedom: Freedom to Bear Witness", I am writing to ask if you might consider sharing with your brother bishops an initiative which empowers our Catholic students to exercise the "Freedom to Bear Witness" during their many years within their public schools.

The volunteers of Catholics for Freedom of Religion (CFFR) are often asked by concerned parents and grandparents to help educate our children about the facts of religious freedom. With support from the DRVC Office of Faith Formation, CFFR's new initiative, "Teaching Our Children They Are Free to Speak", is now educating Confirmation students and their families about the rights of religious expression in our public schools as detailed by the US Dept. of Education. The materials we have assembled include teacher instructions, "Free to Speak" pamphlets, a student flyer, suggested activities and follow up materials.

The feedback from Directors of Religious Education and parents has been "We didn't know this information. Everyone should know this!" One parish's DRE said, "I never knew this. And if I don't know it the other teachers and parents don't know it. I am going to spend time with my teachers reviewing this and preparing to present it to the students." The students have been engaged and eager to learn more... and to share what they are learning.

The obstacles to faith in school settings are growing daily across our country. Year after year, as students learn they are "Free to Speak", these young Catholics will know their rights to witness their faith. They can become examples to students of all faiths that our schools are not "God-Free zones". Their understanding of religious freedom rights can benefit their high school and college experiences and their future families as they begin to influence our culture to once again understand and respect religious freedom.

Bishop Murphy, our volunteers are grateful for your encouragement and support. We thank God for placing us in the Diocese of Rockville Centre where you have provided leadership and resources we could never have expected. We hold you in our prayers always.

Respectfully yours in Christ,

Barbara Samuella, President
Catholics for Freedom of Religion



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