

Rally for Religious Freedom on June 27, 2012 - G.P. Ragan

A special thanks to Becky Bresnahan for singing our National Anthem and getting us off to a good start. Good Evening to all people of faith and good will who are gathered here tonight. I am Fr. Jerry Ragan and I praise God that he has moved your hearts to stand up and give witness to your faith. I rejoice that Fr. Jaceck Szusster and the people of Most Holy Trinity are hosting us. Please, join me in showing them our appreciation. And do we have folks from St. Theresa of Avila here. Let's give them a cheer! And St. Joseph's Parish! St. Mary on the Hill! Alleluia Community - we thank them for their sound system. Are there people from other faith communities with us? And of course I am always impressed by the witness of our young people who belong to our different youth groups.

How good it is for us to be here during this Fortnight for Religious Freedom. During these two weeks that lead up to our Independence Day, the US bishops have asked us to undertake prayer and action in support of religious freedom. So tonight we join in a national campaign of witness for religious liberty. We believe it is important not only to be able to worship our God in there but also to speak his name out here in the public square across from the Federal Courthouse. Unfortunately, there are more and more forces in our society that want to silence the voice of faith. Just yesterday morning I attended the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast at First Baptist Church and the mayor told me that he was being sued by a national group of atheists who object to the fact that once a month the mayor gathers with men and woman who are Jewish and Moselm and Christian to pray for the people of this city. It is a crazy world we live in and getting crazier all the time. We are not perfect and we have not always lived the gospel call to love one another, to love especially the poor. But we gather tonight to say that our God has made a difference in our lives and our faith has made a huge difference in our world. We gather here tonight to say,

“Take away our Christ and you remove the only reliable foundation for our values, institutions and way of life.”

To be able to freely talk about our God and allow his will to direct our lives is a precious grace that He has given to us. Our country was founded on this concept of religious freedom. It is something we as Americans and as Catholics insist upon. While we pray tonight that the Health and Human Services mandate for Church institutions to pay for the abortion pill will be over- turned by the Supreme Court tomorrow, this Fortnight for Freedom is about so much more than government overreach or partisan politics. It is about how we live our faith each and everyday.

As Archbishop Chaput stated at the beginning of this fortnight, “Politics and the courts are important. But our religious freedom ultimately depends on the vividness of our own Christian faith—in other words, how deeply we believe it, and how honestly we live it. Religious liberty is an empty shell if the spiritual core of a people is weak. Or to put it more bluntly, if people don’t believe in God, religious liberty isn’t a value. That’s the heart of the matter. It’s the reason Pope Benedict calls us to a Year of Faith this October. The worst enemies of religious freedom aren’t ‘out there’ among the legion of critics who hate Christ or the Gospel or the church, or all three. The worst enemies are in here, with us—all of us, clergy, religious, and lay—when we live our faith with tepidness, routine, and hypocrisy.”

So, here in the public square, I ask you are you ready to stand up for your Faith? I am! Are to ready to profess you faith in Jesus Christ? I am! Are ready to make gospel values the foundation of your life? I am! Praise God! Praise God! Praise God! If not us, who? If not here, where? If not now, when? And if not for His Kingdom, why? Praise God that we are standing up for our faith! Praise God! Praise God!

Homily for Independence Day – Mt.5:1-12 – G. P. Ragan

Today is the fourth of July, a day of parades, political speeches, fireworks and back yard barbecues. But most of all it is a day of celebrating our Independence; an independence which was won and is maintained by the sacrifice of many lives. We are celebrating an Independence that is not Absolute. Adam, the first man, thought that he had Absolute Independence and we are still suffering from the effects of it. Only God has Absolute Independence. Our Independence is dependent on God.

The question of today's Gospel is a question all of us struggle with each and everyday. Will we trust God totally and completely in all things? Our dependence on his love; our trust in his love is the only way to true happiness. To be poor in spirit is to recognize that all we have is God's gift: our very existence, our families, our health, our talents, even the freedoms that we enjoy in this great country. All is a gift from God.

This dependence on God is clearly stated in our Declaration of Independence. It begins like this, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Our true happiness is something endowed by our Creator. Our nation was founded on belief in God. The President takes his oath of office by placing his hand on the Bible, the Word of God, and ends with, "So help me God." In our pledge of allegiance we say, "One nation under God." Engraved on our money is "In God we trust." Our Congress has a chaplain, begins each session with a prayer and provides for chaplains for the Military.

The whole purpose of the Fortnight of Freedom that we conclude today is to say that as faithful Catholics we want to pursue our right to true happiness in our society. We gather this morning as patriotic Americans to say that our God has made a difference in our lives and our faith has made a huge difference in the life of our country. We gather here today to say, take away our Christ and you remove

the only reliable foundation for our values, institutions and way of life.

To be able to freely talk about our God and allow his will to direct our lives is a precious grace that He has given to us. Our country was founded on this concept of religious freedom. It is something we as Americans and as Catholics insist upon. Our Founding Fathers may have opted for a separation of Church and state but not for a separation of God and state. The division of life into the sacred and the secular is a false dichotomy. There is not now, there never was and there never will be the purely secular, that is, anyone or anything which is not dependent on God. What the Constitution guarantees is not freedom FROM religion but freedom OF religion, freedom to practice religion. The irony, the contradiction, is that those who are pushing for freedom FROM religion are actually pushing THEIR OWN RELIGION, which is secular humanism.

Pope Benedict XVI. told the US bishops on the occasion of their ad limina visit in Rome this past January: “There can be no doubt that a more consistent witness on the part of America’s Catholics to their deepest convictions would make a major contribution to the renewal of society as a whole” (Pope Benedict XVI. to US Bishops on January 19, 2012 in Rome).

As faithful Catholics, as patriotic Americans, our most important contribution is, and always was, to strive for the perfection of the beatitudes; to trust God in all things; to realize that our Independence and true happiness ultimately depends on Him. Amen! Amen!