

**Remarks for God Belongs in My City Prayer Walk
Illinois State Capitol, Springfield**

August 24, 2013

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a privilege for me to be with you at the conclusion of this Prayer Walk and to offer a few remarks as we gather together and celebrate the great gift of faith and our desire that faith be a distinguishing mark here in the city of Springfield.

In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it, we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20). These words serve as a reminder to us that because of our faith, this world is not all that there is, but that we look forward to something much greater. Our true home is not to be found here, rather, it is to be found in Heaven. When we look at the state of affairs in our world, marked by so many forms of tragedy and suffering, these words are a source of great comfort and hope. They encourage us to not give up on our journey of faith, no matter how difficult the road may be, there is something to which we can look forward.

At the same time, we must be aware of a danger that we can easily face as we fix our attention on the goal of Heaven. The temptation exists to see all of the negative things that are happening in our world and think that they are beyond our control. As a result, we can have a tendency to turn in on ourselves and just focus on what it is that *we* need to do in order to receive our promised inheritance. Our primary focus, in this case, is very small, extending barely beyond ourselves to our families and maybe our churches. We are comfortable working on this level because we can see a greater possibility for success among those who are most like us. To expand our efforts beyond that sometimes may be seen as not being worth the effort.

This type of attitude is not what Jesus had in mind for His disciples, nor is it what He has in mind for us. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells His listeners: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house" (Mt 5:14-15). We are called to let the light of our faith shine for others to see, not just keep it hidden in our homes and in our congregations on Sunday morning. That light is meant to shine

everywhere. Every aspect of our lives should be guided by the light of our faith, not just because it is the path that will lead us to Heaven, but because it gives a witness for others to see and hopefully turn their lives around to follow that same path as well. As more and more people set out on this path, we also will notice a positive change in how we live here on this earth. Our relationships on every level will benefit because we will be guided by a way of living which is centered on love, a love which expresses itself in its concern for the well-being of all, not just a few.

This is a part of why we are here today. We have come out to witness to the beauty of our faith and to let the light of that faith shine for the entire city of Springfield to see. We want them to see the love that unites us and motivates us to work for a better community that is rooted in the principles behind our faith, principles which seek to promote peace and good among all of the members of this city. By our witness, we are making a bold statement that God does indeed belong in our city and that we are not content to let Him be pushed aside, which has happened far too frequently. We are convinced of the difference that God makes in life and we want the rest of our city to experience that difference as well.

In order to bring God into our city, it is vitally important that all of us from our various Christian denominations find common ground to work with our fellow brothers and sisters baptized in Christ. In this regard, I was pleased to see the recent interview in THE WALL STREET JOURNAL with Russell Moore, the incoming President of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. In that interview, Mr. Moore said that he wants to refocus the evangelical movement on serving as a religious example battling in the public square on "three core issues" - life, marriage and religious liberty.¹

I wholeheartedly agree with these priorities and pray that there will be fruitful cooperation between Catholics and other Christians on these core issues of life, marriage and religious liberty. In fact, Mr. Moore last month joined Archbishop William Lori, the Archbishop of Baltimore and the Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty, of which I am a member, and over one hundred other religious leaders from a broad spectrum of religious groups, as well as scholars and heads of faith-based institutions and civil rights organizations, in signing an open letter, entitled, "Standing Together for Religious Freedom."² This is a great step in our interfaith collaboration.

This task which we have chosen to undertake is certainly not an easy one, but that should not discourage us from beginning to work toward the goal. Just over 150 years ago, this city's most famous resident, Abraham Lincoln found himself faced with the very difficult task of assuming leadership for this country as the President of the United States. In his brief farewell address here in Springfield, he spoke about how much he relied on God to assist him in this task. He was convinced that with God, he would not fail, but would succeed. It is this same trust that we must place in God for ourselves and our city. We must not be discouraged by what seems to be an impossible task, but be reminded of what St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). God is indeed for us and for our city. Let us pray that by the witness of our lives, all of the members of this city may be attracted to the source of our light, God Himself, and seek to make Him a part of their lives so as to walk according to His ways, fostering a community of disciples serving one another and building one another up as we all advance toward the fulfillment of our hope in the city which awaits all of us, the new and heavenly Jerusalem.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Naomi Schaefer Riley, "From Moral Majority to 'Prophetic Minority,' The Weekend Interview with Russell Moore, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, August 17-18, 2013, p. A11.

² "Standing Together for Religious Freedom: An Open Letter to All Americans," <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/upload/standing-together-for-religious-freedom.pdf>.