

**Diocesan Respect Life Mass and Rosary Walk
Granite City, Illinois**

**The Memorial of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus
October 1, 2011**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, men and women religious, dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our gathering today for our annual Diocesan Respect Life Mass and Rosary Walk provides a very important public witness not only to express our visible support for all human life from conception to natural death, but also to pray for God's will to be done in this regard, through the intercession of our Blessed Mother. Thank you for being here and praying with us.

His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Chairman of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has chosen as the theme for this year's Respect Life Program, "I came so that all might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). In this brief statement of his divine mission, Jesus "refers both to our hope of *eternal* life, to be restored through his death and resurrection, and to our life *in this*

world."¹ Because the mission of Jesus Christ encompasses the full range of human experiences, true discipleship must likewise encompass the totality of our lives; no part of life can be kept hidden away from the light of the Gospel.

Everyone who claims the name of Christian – whether clergy or laity, elected official, civil servant or servant – must allow their faith to govern every aspect of public life. In recent years we have begun to feel the harm that comes when Christians attempt to compartmentalize their faith and seek the political gain as the greatest good. Such a destructive mentality is making itself felt ever more keenly in recent months, both in the State of Illinois and in the federal government.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in their Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*, stated clearly the Church's teaching regarding religious freedom. They said:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.(2) This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.²

Most regrettably, this fundamental right of every person to the freedom of religion, so often enshrined even in civil law, is facing new attacks each day.

We might expect such attacks on the freedom of religion in certain parts of the world under more totalitarian and dictatorial regimes, but we do not often expect such an attack in the United States of America.

Our Founding Fathers sought to guarantee for us the freedom of religion and so they gave us the first amendment to our Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." While many secularists today claim to uphold the first part of this amendment, they willing ignore the second part, that Congress shall not prohibit the free exercise of religion.

With the growing encroachment of secularism in mind, Cardinal DiNardo went on to say:

Jesus' promise of "life to the full" is especially poignant today, when our culture and sometimes our government promote values inimical to the happiness and true good of individuals and society. We face increasing attempts to expunge God and religious discourse from public life. This promotes the dangerous proposition that human beings enjoy no special status by virtue of their God-given humanity. Some now even seek to eliminate religiously motivated people and organizations from public programs, by forcing them to violate their moral and religious convictions or stop serving the needy.³

We need only consider two situations that are illustrative of an ever-growing trend before us at the present moment to see the truth of his words: the State of Illinois' attempt to push Catholic Charities out of foster care and adoption services because of our religious faith, and the attempt by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to require all private health plans to provide surgical sterilization and all FDA-approved contraceptive drugs and devices which could force Catholics out of healthcare.

In the State of Illinois, the Department of Children and Family Services is refusing to recognize the freedom of religion guaranteed by the legislation in question: the Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act.

On the federal level, it may be possible to obtain an exemption from this mandate for religious reasons, but only if an organization can meet very strict criteria, criteria that Jesus himself would not be able to meet.

According to the mandate, a church is not a religious employer if it (a) serves those who are not already members of the church, (b) fails to hire based on religion, or (c) does not restrict its charitable and missionary purposes to the inculcation of religious values.

Such narrow criteria bear no reasonable relation to any legitimate (let alone compelling) government purpose. Under these criteria, even the ministry of Jesus and the early Christian Church would not qualify as “religious,” because they did not confine their ministry to their co-religionists or engage only in a preaching ministry. Imagine the outcry if our Catholic Charities, Catholic hospitals, and Catholic universities announced that they would only hire Catholics and only serve Catholics. But that is not our approach, which itself is based on a religious principle shown in the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus teaches concern and assistance for those in need, regardless of faith differences.

While the exemption is deeply problematic, the fundamental problem is with the mandate itself. Only by rescinding the mandate will all of the serious moral problems that the mandate creates be eliminated.

If we are to protect religious freedom and the fundamental right to life of every person, we must redouble our efforts. Cardinal DiNardo has called us to renew our efforts, saying, “Catholics must not shrink from the obligation to assert the values and principles we hold essential to the common good, beginning with the right to life of every human being and the right of every woman and man to express and live by his or her religious beliefs and well-formed conscience.”⁴

No small part of our present difficulties lies in the poor formation given to so many consciences, both on the part our educational system and on the part of individual believers who have grown too lax in their faith. I urge you, then, dear friends, to gently and lovingly help your bishops and priests form the consciences of your children, your parents, neighbors, coworkers, family and friends with the truth of the Gospel and of the natural moral law.

If these efforts are to bear great fruit, as the Lord wills, we must each strive to follow the Little Way of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, whose

memorial we celebrate today. To do small things with great love, she taught, was the way to holiness; her words remain true to this day and are the way for us to change minds and to convert hearts, to turn this nation what Blessed Pope John Paul II aptly called a culture of death to a culture of life.

We pray in this Eucharist for the grace to follow her Little Way, that each of us might say with her: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction.”⁵

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Daniel N. Cardinal DiNardo, Statement for Respect Life Month, September 26, 2011. Emphases original.

² Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 2.

³ DiNardo, Statement for Respect Life Month.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵ Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, *Manuscrits autobiographiques, Liseux 1957*, 229. In the Office of Readings, October 1.