

**HOMILY FOR THE MASS IN OBSERVANCE OF THE FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM
ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE INSTALLATION OF
THE MOST REVEREND THOMAS JOHN PAPROCKI AS THE
NINTH BISHOP OF SPRINGFIELD IN ILLINOIS**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Feast of St. Thomas More and John Fisher
June 22, 2012**

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

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good for us to be here to celebrate this Mass in observance of the Fortnight for Freedom on this feast of the holy martyrs, Saints Thomas More and Cardinal John Fisher. This also happens to be the second anniversary of my installation as the ninth Bishop of Springfield in Illinois. That might seem to be a coincidence, but as Blessed John Paul II used to say, "There are no coincidences, only God's Providence."

The connection between these various elements that we mark today goes back to the first meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Religious Liberty of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which took place in Baltimore last November. As our committee was discussing various ways and appropriate times during the year that we might involve the faithful of our country in public prayer and education about religious liberty, I thought of the feast day of my patron saints and namesakes, Saints Thomas More and John Fisher. Having been installed as Bishop of Springfield in Illinois on their feast day in 2010, I think of them and pray for their intercession everyday. As they were executed for refusing to obey an unjust law that contradicted their Catholic faith, these great martyrs would also provide much-needed inspiration.

Mindful that our nation's Independence Day celebration follows their feast day within a couple of weeks, I quickly did the calculation in my head and figured that a two-week period, called a fortnight, would begin on June 21, the Vigil of Saints Thomas More and John Fisher, and end on the Fourth of July. Making the connection between this two-week period and the civic observance of our nation's freedom, the phrase "Fortnight for Freedom" came to mind. The *Ad Hoc* Committee on Religious Liberty liked the suggestion and I'm glad that this theme has resonated with so many people of faith across our nation.

Being the author of a suggestion puts one in a unique position of being able to describe its intended meaning. I have had people say to me that the Bishops should use this Fortnight for Freedom to organize public rallies, protests and demonstrations. Others have said that this is precisely what the Bishops intended to do for political purposes. That is not what I or the other members of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Religious Liberty had in mind when we conceived this idea. Clearly our focus is on prayer and education.

The significance of this fortnight as an appropriate time to pray for religious liberty can be seen simply by looking at the liturgical calendar for this two-week period:

- As already noted, today marks the memorial of two British martyrs who refused to take the Oath of Supremacy, which purported to make the King head of the Church in England instead of the Pope. The reason for the King's action was the Pope's refusal to grant an annulment of the King's marriage.

When King Henry VIII decided to annul his marriage to Queen Catherine of

Aragon, Bishop John Fisher appeared in court on her behalf, where he declared that, like John the Baptist, he was ready to die on behalf of the indissolubility of marriage. Sir Thomas More, who had resigned as the King's Chancellor, and Bishop John Fisher had remained faithful to the Church. For this they were both beheaded.

- June 24 is the Solemnity of the birth of St. John the Baptist, who was beheaded by King Herod for telling the King that it was wrong for him to have divorced his wife so he could marry his brother's wife (cf. Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21; Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9).
- June 28 is the Memorial of St. Irenaeus, bishop and martyr, who gave his life defending the fullness of the Christian faith. His greatest work is "Against Heresies." As a bishop, he understood that he held a particular charism and responsibility to witness to the fullness of truth.
- June 29 is the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, both of whom died as martyrs in Rome, during the persecution of the Emperor Nero, for their public witness of faith in Jesus Christ.
- June 30 is the memorial of the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome, honoring those many Christian who were tortured, crucified, and burned alive in 64 A.D. in Nero's gardens on the Vatican Hill.
- July 3 is the Feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle, who evangelized Syria, Persia and India. He also died as a martyr for the faith.

- There are other saints' feast days during the fortnight who were not martyrs, but who nevertheless bore great witness to the Christian faith:
 - June 21 is the Memorial of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, who cared for the sick during a plague until he contracted the disease and died from it himself. Technically this means that he was not a martyr, but he did give his life as a consequence of living out his Christian beliefs.
 - June 26 is the Feast of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the Founder of Opus Dei, who taught that God calls us to lead a holy life in ordinary things, not just in church, but also in our work and our family and social life.
 - June 27 is the Memorial of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop and doctor, who wrote treatises that clarified the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. By doing so, he helped prevent heresies from taking root in the Christian community. He was the most brilliant theologian of the Alexandrian tradition. His writings are characterized by accurate thinking, precise exposition, and great reasoning skills.

All of these commemorations of courageous witnesses of faith will culminate on the Fourth of July, which of course is not an ecclesiastical holyday, but a civic holiday. Nevertheless, the *Roman Missal* for the United States does provide liturgical texts for Independence Day. The Collect for Independence Day will provide a very fitting culmination to our Fortnight for Freedom: "God of justice, Father of truth, who guide creation in wisdom and goodness to fulfillment in Christ your Son, open our hearts to

the truth of his Gospel, that your peace may rule in our hearts and your justice guide our lives.”

This prayer helps to put this fortnight in its proper perspective, praying for justice, truth, wisdom, goodness and peace. I said at the outset that the Fortnight for Freedom was not about Bishops organizing public rallies, protests and demonstrations. However, that does not mean that the beneficial effects of our prayers should not go beyond the walls of our churches. Again, the new translation of the *Roman Missal* makes clear that the Communion we share in the Eucharist is to have an effect in our lives, as the dismissal at Mass proclaims, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”

Our late Holy Father, the great Blessed John Paul II, gave an extraordinary example of the connection between the Mass and the effect that our faith can have in the world. After his election as Pope in 1978, John Paul returned to his native Poland in June 1979 and celebrated an outdoor Mass in Warsaw, where more than a million people had come out to be with the Polish Pope. In Warsaw’s Victory Square, Pope John Paul II gave what papal biographer George Weigel called the greatest sermon of John Paul’s life. Why, the pope asked, had God lifted a Pole to the papacy? Perhaps it was because of how Poland had suffered for centuries, and through the 20th century had become “the land of a particularly responsible witness” to God. The people of Poland, he suggested, had been chosen for a great role, to understand, humbly but surely, that they were the repository of a special “witness of His cross and His resurrection.” He asked then if the people of Poland accepted the obligations of such a role in history. In response, the crowd began chanting, “We want God! We want God!”

After Warsaw, the Pope went to Krakow. A crowd of two million to three million people came for another outdoor Mass with the Pope. In his homily there, John Paul took on communism directly by focusing on communism's attempt to kill the religious heritage of a country that had for a thousand years believed in Christ. He said:

"Is it possible to dismiss Christ and everything which he brought into the annals of the human being? Of course it is possible. The human being is free. The human being can say to God, 'No.' The human being can say to Christ, 'No.' But the critical question is: Should he? And in the name of what 'should' he? With what argument, what reasoning, what value held by the will or the heart does one bring oneself, one's loved ones, one's countrymen and nation to reject, to say 'no' to Him with whom we have all lived for one thousand years? He who formed the basis of our identity and has Himself remained its basis ever since."

The Holy Father continued, "As a bishop does in the sacrament of Confirmation so do I today extend my hands in that apostolic gesture over all who are gathered here today, my compatriots. And so I speak for Christ himself: 'Receive the Holy Spirit!'

"I speak too for St. Paul: 'Do not quench the Spirit!'

"I speak again for St. Paul: 'Do not grieve the Spirit of God!'

"You must be strong, my brothers and sisters! You must be strong with the strength that faith gives! You must be strong with the strength of faith! You must be faithful! You need this strength today more than any other period of our history. . . .

You must be strong with love, which is stronger than death. . . . When we are strong with the Spirit of God, we are also strong with the faith of man. . . . There is therefore

no need to fear. . . . So . . . I beg you: Never lose your trust, do not be defeated, do not be discouraged. . . . Always seek spiritual power from Him from whom countless generations of our fathers and mothers have found it. Never detach yourselves from Him. Never lose your spiritual freedom.”

Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass and preached a homily about God, about freedom, about not giving in to discouragement, about staying strong. Then he went back to Rome, but the people went home changed by that Mass and that homily. After that Mass they would never be the same. Poland would never be the same. It was the beginning of the end of Soviet communism.

When I stood here two years ago today and preached the homily at my Mass of Installation as your Bishop, I had no idea that within a year the State of Illinois would force Catholic Charities out of foster care and adoption services because of our religious beliefs about marriage and family life. I did not expect that in my second year we would be back in court seeking now to prevent the federal government from imposing a mandate on us that is contrary to Catholic teaching. I would prefer not to have to fight these cases in court, but that is where we are and that is what we must do. My job as your shepherd is to protect the flock, but we cannot and must not run away from this challenge. As St. Thomas More wrote, “You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds.... What you cannot turn to good, you must at least make as little bad as you can.”

As we receive Christ into our hearts in this Eucharist, I give thanks for the graces that Almighty God has granted to me by allowing me the privilege and joy of serving

here as a successor of the apostles. I am very happy to be your Bishop and I am confident that the Lord will provide for us in all of our needs. As Saint Thomas More wrote to his daughter Margaret while he was in prison, "do not let your mind be troubled over anything that shall happen to me in this world. Nothing can come but what God wills. And I am very sure that whatever that be, however bad it may seem, it shall indeed be the best."

As Pope John Paul II extended his hands and prayed over his people in their time of need, I now do the same and make his words my own, asking for God's graces to face the challenges of our time:

"And so I speak for Christ himself: 'Receive the Holy Spirit!'

"I speak too for St. Paul: 'Do not quench the Spirit!'

"I speak again for St. Paul: 'Do not grieve the Spirit of God!'

"You must be strong, my brothers and sisters! You must be strong with the strength that faith gives! You must be strong with the strength of faith! You must be faithful! . . . You must be strong with love, which is stronger than death. . . . When we are strong with the Spirit of God, we are also strong with the faith of man. . . . There is therefore no need to fear. . . . So . . . I beg you: Never lose your trust, do not be defeated, do not be discouraged. . . . Always seek spiritual power from Him from whom countless generations of our fathers and mothers have found it. Never detach yourselves from Him. Never lose your spiritual freedom."

May God give us this grace. Amen.