

**Fortnight for Freedom Prayer Rally  
Lincoln Statue at the State Capitol**

**July 3, 2013**

**† Most Rev. Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear Friends of the Fortnight for Freedom:

Today marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, which was fought from July 1<sup>st</sup> to July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1863, in and around the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, resulting in an important victory for the Union Army fighting for freedom against the Confederate forces. On November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln used the dedication ceremony for the Gettysburg National Cemetery to deliver his historic Gettysburg Address, honoring the Union soldiers who had died on that battlefield. In his famous conclusion to that address, Mr. Lincoln said, “that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Today, through our prayers for religious freedom, we continue the “unfinished work” for which they fought. The U.S. Bishops have declared a Fortnight for Freedom, asking Catholics to engage in a “great hymn of prayer for our country” and a “national campaign of teaching and witness for religious liberty.”<sup>1</sup>

Fittingly, this two-week period of prayer, which began on June 21<sup>st</sup>, the vigil of the martyrs Saints Thomas More and Cardinal John Fisher, will conclude tomorrow, the Fourth of July, the day we celebrate as a nation all our liberties. The bishops of the United States called us to participate in this two-week period of prayer and action to address the many current challenges to religious freedom, including the mandate of the Department of Health and Human Services for certain categories of employers, including many Church institutions, to provide or facilitate health insurance for contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs.

For more than a year, the bishops, Catholic citizens, and religious leaders of various faiths have attempted to work with the government to secure an exemption from the mandate. Unfortunately, the government has been unwilling to provide an exemption for the vast majority of faith-based organizations, including Catholic hospitals, universities, and charitable

organizations. Many private employers who have objections to providing these morally problematic services have gone to court to assert their rights to the free exercise of their religious beliefs under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. So far, in 21 out of 27 of these cases, judges have granted preliminary injunctions barring the government from enforcing the HHS mandate against them. These are not final decisions, but the preliminary injunctions are encouraging signs of hope for the protection of religious liberty.

In addition to the mandate, there are other threats to religious freedom: proposed laws which prohibit the Church from offering spiritual and charitable assistance to undocumented immigrants; new laws that have effectively closed Church-run adoption agencies and foster care services in Boston, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and right here in Illinois, and last week's Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Windsor* that wrongly attempts to redefine marriage in U.S. law. As in the case of *Roe v. Wade* striking down abortion laws 40 years ago, the United States Supreme Court has again usurped its legitimate prerogative through a raw exercise of judicial power by giving legal protection to an intrinsic evil.

This judicial decision is absolutely devoid of moral authority. As St. Augustine said in the quote we heard earlier from the letter by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., “An unjust law is no law at all.” People of faith are called to reject the wrongful redefinition of marriage and bear witness to the truth of Holy Matrimony as a lasting, loving and life-giving union between one man and one woman.

In the face of these serious threats to religious liberty, the Church cannot be silent, nor can it cease to beg the Lord for a restoration of our rights. The Scriptures tell us that “the truth will set us free” (John 8:31).

May this Fortnight for Freedom bear fruit as a time of intense and focused prayer, asking the Lord for protection of conscience and religious liberty. As we bring our prayers to Him, we desire the same gift of which the Prophet Zechariah spoke: that the Lord might pour upon our country “a spirit of grace and petition” to help assure the preservation of our freedoms for generations to come.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> USCCB, Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty: A Statement on Religious Liberty*, April 2012.