

**Homily for Fortnight for Freedom Mass  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**July 3, 2016**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

At this time of year, people of our nation are enjoying this Independence Day weekend. Many of us are likely to be getting ready to go on a summer vacation. Some of us leave everything to the last minute, of course, resulting in a frantic dash, trying to remember where everything is: tickets, passports and so on. For others, the excitement of travel begins with the preparation, which perhaps on occasion becomes even more important than the trip itself. This, it seems, is not a new phenomenon. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the great Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson, of *Treasure Island* fame, penned the phrase, “to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.”

It is surprising, therefore, when we read in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that Jesus not only sent out disciples in a state that we could describe as woefully unprepared, but that He expressly forbade them

to make adequate preparation. In today's Gospel passage, unique to Luke, Jesus appoints seventy-two others – disciples not numbered among the Twelve – and sends them out in pairs to places that He himself will visit. Among His instructions to them, Jesus lists a whole series of things the disciples are not to do. In a nutshell, they have to do absolutely nothing to prepare for their journey. In the context of modern-day travel, Jesus would be saying, “Don't take any currency (or credit cards) with you; don't take luggage, because you won't be packing anything – oh, and don't bother taking a change of shoes!” Likewise, they must not look around for the best accommodation; they are to settle wherever they are made welcome, and they are to eat what is set before them. Worst of all: they are not to stop on the way to talk to anyone!

The point is that this journey is not a vacation. Jesus' instructions emphasize the urgency of the task for His ambassadors. Jesus has just begun His journey to Jerusalem. He has set His face resolutely to this task, because in Jerusalem He will meet His destiny: to suffer, die and rise again. Before He reaches there, the kingdom of God must be proclaimed as far and as insistently as possible. Disciples must not delay the start of the

journey through preparation, and they must not worry about what to take. They are embarking on God's work as Jesus' emissaries: God will provide them with everything they need.

All the Gospels mention the 12 apostles and their being commissioned by Jesus to continue His mission. However, only St. Luke, in the passage we have just heard, refers to the sending out of the 72. There must be a reason for this. Jesus says that the harvest is big and there are not enough people to do the necessary work. In the same manner, Luke wants to tell us that the mission of Jesus is not carried forward only by priests and religious, but it is the responsibility of every believer. Through Luke, we learn that the mission of Jesus is also accomplished by ordinary people doing ordinary things and being faithful to their responsibilities in the everyday lives.

Today at this Mass we note the fifth annual observance established by the Catholic Bishops of the United States called the "Fortnight for Freedom." This year's Fortnight began officially began on June 21st and continues until July 4th, when we celebrate our nation's "Independence Day." The theme for this year's Fortnight for Freedom is "Witnesses to

Freedom.” This two-week period is a time when our liturgical calendar in the Catholic Church celebrates a series of great martyrs who gave witness to religious freedom by remaining faithful in the face of persecution by political power—St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, St. John the Baptist, SS. Peter and Paul, and the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome.

Saints Thomas More and John Fisher fit precisely this year’s theme: “Witnesses to Freedom.” For their refusal to assent to King Henry VIII’s divorce of Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his brother, and Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn, as well as their refusal to sign the Oath of Supremacy accepting Henry as head of the Church of England, both were martyred in 1535; they were beheaded nine days apart.

In his apostolic letter proclaiming St. Thomas More the patron of statesmen and politicians, St. John Paul II wrote, “What enlightened his conscience was the sense that man cannot be sundered from God, nor politics from morality.” St. John Fisher also fits that mold.

When both men were canonized in 1935, Pius XI said of John Fisher in his homily, “It was because of his courageous determination to defend the sacred bond of Christian marriage — a bond indissoluble for all, even

for those who wear the royal diadem – and to vindicate the primacy with which the Roman pontiffs are invested by divine command.”

Regarding St. Thomas More, Pope Pius XI observed that, “when he saw that the doctrines of the Church were gravely endangered, he knew how to despise resolutely the flattery of human respect, how to resist, in accordance with his duty, the supreme head of the state when there was question of things commanded by God and the Church, and how to renounce with dignity the high office with which he was invested.”

Bishop John Fisher was named a Cardinal of the Church while he was in prison. In his canonization homily, Pius XI described Cardinal Fisher on his way to the scaffold as raising prayers in supplication for himself, for his people and for his king. “Thus did he give another clear proof that the Catholic religion does not weaken, but increases, the love of one’s country.”

Saints such as Thomas More, John Fisher and John the Baptist died as martyrs because of their belief in the true meaning of marriage and human sexuality. We should draw strength from their example.

As we celebrate this Fortnight for Freedom, it is good to reflect on the true meaning of freedom. There is the false notion of freedom, as seen in the words of Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, who wrote his infamous “mystery passage” in the 1992 decision of the United States Supreme Court, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

This theme was repeated in the decision of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, issued one year ago on June 26, where Justice Kennedy said, “The Constitution promises liberty to all within its reach, a liberty that includes certain specific rights that allow persons, within a lawful realm, to define and express their identity.” One might call this fantasy freedom, where people use their imaginations to create their own subjective realities. The current expression of this is the attempt to redefine marriage and in the transgender issue, where people invoke freedom to define their own gender identity regardless of their biological reality of their physical bodies.

In contrast to fantasy freedom, there is the true freedom that we find in the Bible, the freedom expressed in Exodus 32:12, which describes the commandments engraved in stone. This is the same freedom expressed by the prophet in Jeremiah 31:33 and by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:3, which describes the letters of the law engraved not on tablets of stone but in our hearts. In James 1:25, we read that God's way is the perfect law, which is the law of liberty.

Seen in this way, freedom is not a license to do as one pleases, but the ability to live in accord with God's law, free from external coercion from the state, big business, or anyone else.

During this Fortnight for Freedom, we join our prayers with others throughout the nation who understand that true freedom, not false freedom or fantasy freedom, is what made our country great.

May God give us this grace. Amen.