

**Homily for the Diocesan Information Systems Conference
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here, as we come to the altar of the Lord to give thanks for the many blessings He bestows on us. In particular, we thank God for the Diocesan Information Systems Conference and the ways that its members are using the various means of modern technology to communicate the Gospel message.

Earlier today I had the opportunity to lead a prayer rally at the State Capitol Building in Springfield; in observance of the “Fortnight for Freedom” which began last week. This two-week period, which is called a fortnight, is a time when our liturgical calendar celebrates a series of great martyrs who remained faithful in the face of persecution by political power, including Saint Thomas More and Saint John Fisher, Saint John the Baptist, Saints Peter and Paul, and the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome. The purpose of this effort is to issue a nationwide call to defend religious liberty and to urge efforts to protect the first freedom of the Bill of Rights.

The theme of this year's Fortnight is "Freedom for Mission." In past years, people have participated in the Fortnight in diverse ways, including interfaith prayer services, special Masses and holy hours, and public events where speakers have highlighted the various threats to religious liberty, both at home and abroad. This year, we encourage Christians to use these two weeks to reflect on the importance of religious freedom so that the Church might have space to carry out her mission of service and mercy.

Today, the Memorial of St. Irenaeus, bishop and martyr, celebrates the life of someone who certainly understood what it meant to be Christ's disciple and to defend the faith against attacks from the outside world. As a matter of fact, Saint Irenaeus made the ultimate sacrifice for the faith, that of giving his life in the defense 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 and to promote the mission of the Church.

The Gospel that we heard proclaimed just a few moments ago is quite fitting for the memorial of Saint Irenaeus and for us during this Fortnight for Freedom. In it we hear our Lord's warning to His disciples regarding people who are false prophets. He even goes on to compare

these people who try to lead the faithful away from God to ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. It is important for us to take heed to our Lord's warning even today when many different outside influences try to lead us away from our relationship with God. As Christ's disciples living in the world today, we must be the voice to defend the Church from the attacks that seem all too common. Whether these are in the form of verbal attacks of the Church herself or whether they are against our way of life, we have the splendid example of the great saints, particularly that of Saint Irenaeus, for us to emulate in our defense of the faith.

In this way, by our leading lives that are consistent with our faith and the Gospel message even in the face of opposition, we will be known to others as true disciples of our Lord: not just His disciples in name but also in our deeds. Then, when He calls us home we will be worthy to hear Him welcome us to our final reward with the words: *Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy* (Matthew 25:21).

May God give us this grace. Amen.