



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

True justice is a matter of conviction, right judgment, rather than feelings

Just last week, on Thursday, June 17, the Supreme Court of the United States unanimously upheld the right of Catholic Social Services in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to obtain an exemption on religious grounds from the City of Philadelphia's requirement that all agencies agree to place foster children with same-sex couples. This is another victory for religious freedom, but it is by no means a guarantee that freedom of religion will prevail in every situation. We have witnessed too many instances in recent years where attempts have been made, often successfully, to allow political or cultural agendas to supersede religious freedom.



It's interesting to note that this Supreme Court decision came less than a week before we Catholics observed the Feast of Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More on June 22. These two English martyrs are recognized for their refusal to accept the decision of King Henry VIII to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon without papal permission and to name himself as Supreme Head of the Church in England.

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John Fisher was a bishop and a scholar who was also a popular preacher and a compassionate pastoral leader who cared deeply for the people of his diocese. Thomas More was a layman who wrote numerous works of theology that refuted the heresies of Protestantism but also that proposed a political philosophy (Utopia) designed to effectively integrate Christian principles into the laws and policies that govern nations. Although Fisher and More had both been close to King Henry, and had served him for many years in

important positions, their rejection of the king's actions caused them to each be beheaded in 1535—St. John Fisher on June 22 and St. Thomas More thirteen days later.

Fisher and More are recognized as martyrs whose religious freedom threatened the ruling power of their day. Their lives are strong reminders that the winds of political fortune are fickle. The way politicians view religious beliefs and practices can change dramatically, sometimes overnight, as was clearly the case under the rule of King Henry VIII.

Religious freedom allows the Church, and all religious communities, to live out their faith in public and to serve the good of all. Beginning June 22, the feast of Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) invites Catholics to pray, reflect, and act to promote religious freedom.

Religious Freedom is described by the USCCB in the following way:

All people desire to know their Creator. All people have a natural impulse to seek the good and to live in accordance with that good. All people can flourish when they pursue the truth about God and respond to the



truth. Religious freedom means that all people have the space to flourish. Religious freedom is both an American value and an important part of Catholic teaching on human dignity. When we promote religious freedom, we promote the common good and thus strengthen the life of our nation and the community of nations.

Themes for Religious Freedom Week 2021 include:

- June 22 – Adoption and Foster Care
- June 23 – Catholic Social Services During the Pandemic
- June 24 – The Equality Act
- June 25 – Church vandalism
- June 26 – Catholics in Nicaragua
- June 27 – Conscience Rights for Healthcare Workers
- June 28 – Christians in Iraq
- June 29 – Free Speech

It's most appropriate that Religious Freedom Week concludes June 29, the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul. These two men were also martyrs whose freedom of religion threatened the

ruling powers of their day—some 1,500 years before the two English martyrs we honor a week earlier on June 22. Certainly without the witness of Sts. Peter and Paul, Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More, and all who were martyred for their right to declare publicly their faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Church and our world would be greatly diminished.

True justice is a matter of conviction and right judgment rather than feelings. Without the right to express our convictions based on religious faith and values, there can be no true justice.

As specified in the Constitution of the United States of America,

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.

Let's pray that our nation will always uphold and defend these constitutional rights, including the freedom of religion. Let's work to elect public officials who will preserve and defend our God-given freedom.

+Charles C. Thompson

A selection from *We Are One in Christ: A Pastoral Letter on Fundamentals of Christian Anthropology*

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson | February 14, 2018

Religious liberty

Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. ... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. ... His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1776).

Religious freedom is rooted in the perennial teaching of the Church on human dignity. It teaches that religious freedom is the cornerstone of a society that promotes human dignity; it is a fundamental human right that follows on the duty of all people to seek the truth about God.

All of the fundamental principles noted above are safeguarded and reinforced by the protection of religious liberty. When religious liberty is threatened or denied, all human rights are jeopardized and the inalienable dignity of every human being is called into question.

As Pope Benedict XVI said during his visit to Cuba several years ago: The Church lives to make others sharers in the one thing she possesses, which is none other than Christ, our hope of glory (cf. Col 1:27). To carry out this duty, she must count on basic religious freedom, which consists in her being able to proclaim and to celebrate her faith also in public, bringing to others the message of love, reconciliation and peace which Jesus brought to the world.

Professing religious faith should not make a person a second-class citizen. While religion is personal, it is never private. The right to religious freedom has as its foundation the very dignity of the human person. Religious freedom is the human right that guarantees all other rights—peace and creative living together will only be possible if freedom of religion is fully respected.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Religious freedom certainly means the right to worship God, individually and in community, as our consciences dictate. But religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families.

Our various religious traditions serve society primarily by the message they proclaim. They call individuals and communities to worship God, the source of all life, liberty and happiness. They remind us of the transcendent dimension of human existence and our irreducible freedom in the face of every claim to



absolute power. We need but look at history, especially the history of the last century, to see the atrocities perpetrated by systems which claimed to build one or another “earthly paradise” by dominating peoples, subjecting them to apparently indisputable principles and denying them any kind of rights.

Our rich religious traditions seek to offer meaning and direction, “they have an enduring power to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and heart” (Evangelii Gaudium, 256). They call to conversion, reconciliation, concern for the future of society, self-sacrifice in the service of the common good, and compassion for those in need. At the heart of their spiritual mission is the proclamation of the truth and dignity of the human person and human rights.

From Pope Francis’s Speech on Religious Liberty given in Philadelphia outside Independence Hall on September 26, 2015.

My Prayer for You

O God, who in martyrdom
have brought true faith to its highest expression,
graciously grant
that, strengthened through the intercession
of Saints John Fisher and Thomas More,
we may confirm by the witness of our life
the faith we profess with our lips.

+ Charles C. Thompson