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Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, June 21, 2015

Fortnight for Freedom

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/062115.cfm>

Job 38:1, 8-11

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Mark 4:35-41



What is a fortnight? It is simply another term for “two weeks.” It is a word more frequently used in England than in the United States, perhaps because of our shorter attention spans.

In 2012, the bishops of the United States established the [Fortnight for Freedom](#) in reaction to the [HHS mandate](#) requiring those who provide health insurance to their employees to include coverage for sterilization and birth control, including abortifacient devices. The narrowly defined religious exemption would mean that many religious institutions would be required to comply with the mandate or otherwise face steep penalties. Beginning on June 21 and ending on July 4, the two-week period provides an opportunity for prayer and education on the most basic of human rights, the right of religious freedom and freedom of conscience.

This year's Fortnight for Freedom begins this Sunday, June 21, with the theme, “[The Freedom to Bear Witness](#)”. [The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) offers many helpful ways for us to participate and witness to the role faith should play not only in the lives of individuals but in our civic engagements.

The issue of religious freedom is increasingly taking center stage in American politics. The controversy surrounding Indiana's [Religious Freedom Restoration Act](#) this past winter as well as the rancor that is sure to result from [Governor Rick Snyder's](#) effort to pass similar legislation in Michigan highlight how emotional the debate has become.

The dysfunction in our political discourse that makes issues of race so difficult to talk openly about has now poisoned our national dialogue on issues of religion and morality. People of faith and conscience are called “bigots” and “haters,” pushing bakers and photographers onto the front lines in the current culture wars. The effect of the name-calling, as well as the fines and loss of employment for those who seek to live in accordance with their conscience, is chilling. I can’t help but wonder myself what might happen to me if one of my clients were to read this article and somehow take offense to it. However, the debate over how to balance the right of people to live as they choose with the rights of others to practice their faith will not be advanced if either side stays silent or allows one side to bully the other into submission.

In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus rebukes his disciples for their lack of faith. He expected them to remain strong and confident despite the storm that threatened to batter their boat. Jesus demands the same faith and courage from us as we strive to live the Gospel despite the increasing climate of intolerance in our society. This year’s Fortnight for Freedom is an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to the civic discourse and serve the common good by insisting that the rights of all persons, no matter their faith or values, be respected.

Douglas Sousa, STL

PRAYER

O God our Creator,
from your provident hand we have received
our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
You have called us as your people and given us
the right and the duty to worship you, the only true God,
and your Son, Jesus Christ.
Through the power and working of your Holy Spirit,
you call us to live out our faith in the midst of the world,
bringing the light and the saving truth of the Gospel
to every corner of society.

We ask you to bless us
in our vigilance for the gift of religious liberty.
Give us the strength of mind and heart
to readily defend our freedoms when they are threatened;
give us courage in making our voices heard
on behalf of the rights of your Church
and the freedom of conscience of all people of faith.

Grant, we pray, O heavenly Father,
a clear and united voice to all your sons and daughters
gathered in your Church
in this decisive hour in the history of our nation,
so that, with every trial withstood
and every danger overcome—
or the sake of our children, our grandchildren,
and all who come after us—
this great land will always be “one nation, under God,

indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

—*Prayer for the Protection of Religious Liberty*, © USCCB, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.

NOTICES

2015 CHURCH NETWORK CONFERENCE, July 13-16, Nashville

The Church Network’s 2015 Conference, “The Rhythm of the Future,” promises to provide a wealth of experiences and benefits for church leaders: a launch event; three keynote addresses; a tradeshow with over two hundred representatives from the best products and services available to congregations; more than seventy workshops presented by experts and leaders in the field of church administration; and networking with other leaders for learning, support, and sharing. To learn more visit <http://member.thechurchnetwork.com/2015conference>.

FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

The Fortnight for Freedom: Freedom to Serve will take place from June 21 to July 4, 2014. The theme of this year’s Fortnight will focus on the freedom to serve the poor and vulnerable in accord with human dignity and the Church’s teaching. For more information and resources for your parish, visit <http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/fortnight-for-freedom/index.cfm>.

PETER’S PENCE COLLECTION

Many dioceses will take up the annual Peter’s Pence collection to support the charitable work of the Holy Father on the weekend of June 29–30. The USCCB offers parish resources on their website at: <http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/peters-pence/collection/index.cfm>.

Visit the LPi website for information on services and publications to build a vibrant parish.
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