

ADDRESS

Evangelization and Religious Freedom

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Rally For Religious Freedom: Our First Amendment Right
Saint John the Baptist Diocesan High School, West Islip, NY
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Before I begin, let me acknowledge the Administration's announcement of their latest attempt at "accommodation". Cardinal Dolan and I talked this morning. We applaud the five month delay in implementing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] Mandate. Our folks are studying the 110 page document.¹ If it shows real understanding and recognition of the right of freedom of religion, we will be grateful. However, the devil is in the details and, I mean that literally. Therefore we will not be surprised if the *New York Times* report is the correct one that the Administration did not budge and therefore we will go forward with our litigation.

Some of the most ancient texts about early Christianity are the ACTS OF THE MARTYRS. These were official documents of the Roman Empire recording trials of Christians accused by Roman authorities. Among them are the ACTA of the Roman Court of 165 AD concerning the great philosopher, intellectual and apologist Justin who declared: "Why would I acquiesce to the demands of the Emperor? No one in his right mind is going to turn away from the worship of the true God and worship false gods!" .The official response of the Judge Rusticus is, *Let those who will not sacrifice to the gods and yield to the command of the Emperor be scourged and led away to be beheaded in accordance with the law.* .Another is the oldest document of African Church history when the Scytillan martyrs refused to obey the command of the emperor and declared they would rather die than sacrifice to the Roman gods: *SINE DOMINICO NON POSSUMUS.*²

¹ For the official announcement, see <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2013pres/06/20130628a.html>, which also contains a PDF link to the actual ruling [Editor].

² For the meaning of the phrase, see the homily given by Pope Benedict XVI on 9 September 2007 at St. Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070909_wien_en.html [Editor].

We are here today to say to our government that we have in us the same hearts as those martyrs. We will not compromise our faith. We will not accept rules and regulations that violate our consciences or impose actions and practices that go against the moral teachings of our faith and our Church. We will not bend our knees to the false gods of secularism. We will not allow Caesar to re-define our faith or banish us, our Church or other religious faiths, from the public square to the shadows of our cities or the walled gardens of our inner selves. **AND WE WILL NOT GIVE UP OR GIVE IN!**

Think of these seven examples that taken together give us a pretty scary picture of what is happening in our American society today:

1. The HHS mandate that imposes insurance coverage of contraceptives, abortion inducing drugs such as Ella, Plan B, some IUDs as well as elective sterilizations.
2. Pressure on Catholic foster care and adoption agencies to place children in “same sex” homes or lose the right to care for these children.
3. Denial of use of public facilities in NY City by small faith communities that have had use of them for decades.
4. Attempting to eliminate [Migration and Refugee Services](#) [MRS] of the USCCB as a contractor to serve immigrants because it does not include abortion or abortion counseling as part of their health care.
5. Attacks on religious groups and refusal to recognize religious groups as legitimate on several college campuses across the country.
6. The White House recent assertion that the President will veto any bill that seeks to protect the religious rights and freedoms of our young people in the military.³
7. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy’s assertion that anyone opposed to “same sex marriage” in our society must be a bigot.

To these examples, we in New York can add the political machinations that produced “same sex marriage” as law in our state and the even more recent abortion expansion plan of the Governor who tried to link abortion expansion to women’s equality issues. We applaud the courage and leadership of State Senator Dean Skelos and the 32-31 majority in the State Senate that includes every single State Senator from Long Island! And we can see right through the hypocrisy of those of the majority in the Assembly who refused to take a stand on nine points that would enhance women’s dignity unless they could have the one they cared about, the one our Governor was interested in: an abortion

³ <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/obama-threatens-to-veto-bill-protecting-soldiers-conscience-rights/> [Editor].

expansion bill that would have erected another wall of protection around abortion on demand to the very end of pregnancy.

It is pretty clear to me. What some saw as a drift toward imposing a pagan world view on us all is in fact a determined, well organized and well healed effort to change the social mores of our country and to impose their secular values and their anti-religious biases on the lives of millions of God-fearing Americans. We are here today to say NO. We are here today to say STOP. We are here today to show that we care ABOUT America and FOR America! And we do so because we affirm that God is sovereign over all life, not the government; and that we worship God, not the idols of power, prestige and presidential dictate.

Let's not fool ourselves. This will not be easy. It will be a long road. We need to stand together. We need to make our voices heard. And we cannot get discouraged. We cannot tire in our commitment. And we must and will stay united and stay the course!

How are we going to do that? I want to suggest the following seven sacramentals.

First, we will be motivated by a concern for the good, the good of every person and the good of our society. Ours is not a partisan cause or a hate-filled agenda. St. Paul reminds us *to overcome evil by good* (Romans 12:21).

Second, we will respect every human being especially those with whom we do not agree. If our cause is just and our desire is to protect and defend religious freedom for everyone, we must also respect the rights of others while insisting their freedom cannot be protected by denying ours.

Third, we will pray because we know that our strength is useless unless it is based on the true source of life, the God who gives us strength for all our efforts and guides all our actions. With God we can have great confidence. Without God we contradict the very rights we are seeking to protect and defend.

Fourth, we will respect the truth about the human person and human dignity and speak that truth to authorities, our neighbors, our fellow citizens. The State of New York and the Supreme Court may not respect the truth about marriage but we will! And we will be unambiguous in its defense.

Fifth, relying on God and the truth about the human person in society, we will seek to educate ourselves, our families, our friends and those who differ with us so that our voice may persuade others of the rightness of our cause.

Sixth, we will support all peaceful and lawful efforts to protect religious freedom and, with all the legitimate and peaceful means available to us, we will oppose all attempts to advance laws, programs and mandates that infringe freedom of conscience and freedom of religious belief and practice in our land.

Seventh, by vote and voice and every kind of united effort, we will support legislators and political leaders who support legislation such as HR 940, the Health Care Conscience Rights Act.

Will we have setbacks? Yes! But will we be discouraged? No! Will we have victories? Yes. Look what happened in our State Senate last week! And look what happened yesterday! The Tenth Circuit Court ruled 5-3 in favor of Hobby Lobby v. Sibelius that for profit businesses can exercise religion and that the HHS Mandate imposed a substantial burden on religious exercise. HOW ABOUT THAT!

Blessed John Paul called us to an evangelization that is new in its approach, its enthusiasm, in its commitment and its fervor. Pope Paul VI reminded us many years ago that the world today needs teachers who are witnesses and witnesses who teach by their lives. The early martyrs, Justin in Rome, the Christians of North Africa, were martyred because they witnessed. Today we are the witnesses. We will pray and we will speak. We will act together and invite others to join us. Our cause is a cause that is great and a truth that cannot be vanquished. Paul is right: *For freedom Christ has made us free!* (Galatians 5:1). And we will never give up, never give in because we know: *whether in chains or laurels religious freedom and liberty know nothing but victories!*⁴

⁴ This is an adaptation of the famous quote by General Douglas MacArthur: “whether in chains or in laurels, liberty knows nothing but victory” [Editor].