

Sermon for the Fortnight of Freedom

We are in, what the Catholic Church in the US has designated as, “The Fortnight of Freedom,” a 14 day period which started on the eve of the feasts of Sts. Thomas More and John Fischer, two great saints in England who were martyred for the sake of religious freedom and civil rights, and ends on the anniversary of the birth of our country, July 4. During this period, the church is asking us to look at how, in recent years, the government has imposed itself on the religious freedoms and civil rights of Americans who are exercising their first amendment rights to practice their religious faith as they see fit. This includes, but is not limited to, our freedom to practice our faith as WE choose, our ability to speak out against abortion which we have recently seen has been an issue with certain religious and conservative groups targeted by the IRS, and our ability to challenge our government which we can see played out in recent revelations that effect the freedom of the press in our country to keep a check on the government.

This is not a new threat in our world even though it might be a new threat in the United States. So how have we gotten to where we are today? What are WE doing, or not doing, that is bringing this about? Some would suggest the answer is that we have removed God and faith from our civil discourse. We are not the faith-full people we claim to be. There is only one way to reverse this trend and it is up to us to do something.

“Take care, (Brothers and Sisters), that above all, faith in God, the first and irreplaceable foundation of all religion, be preserved . . . pure and unstained. The believer in God is not he who utters the name in his speech, but he for whom this sacred word stands for a true and worthy concept of the Divinity. Whoever identifies, by pantheistic confusion, God and the universe, by either lowering God to the dimensions of the world, or raising the world to the dimensions of God, is not a believer in God. Whoever follows that so-called pre-Christian . . . conception of substituting a dark and impersonal destiny for the personal God, denies thereby the Wisdom and Providence of God who ‘(Reaches) from end to end mightily, and (orders) all things sweetly’ (Wisdom viii. 1). Neither is he a believer in God.¹

“Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community - however necessary and honorable be their function in worldly things - whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God; he is far from the true faith in God and from the concept of life which that faith upholds.²

“Whoever wishes to see banished from church and school the Biblical history and the wise doctrines of the Old Testament, blasphemes the name of God, blasphemes the Almighty's plan of salvation, and makes limited and narrow human thought the judge of God's designs over the history of the world: he denies his faith in the true Christ, such as He appeared in the flesh, the Christ who took His human nature from a people that was to crucify Him; and he understands nothing of that universal tragedy of the Son of God who to His torturer's sacrilege opposed the divine and priestly sacrifice of His redeeming death, and made the new alliance the goal of the old alliance, its realization and its crown.³

We must remember that, “Every true and lasting reform has ultimately sprung from the sanctity of men who were driven by the love of God and of men. Generous, ready to stand to attention to any call from God, yet confident in themselves because confident in their vocation, they grew to the size of beacons and reformers. On the other hand, any reformatory zeal, which instead of springing from personal purity, flashes out of passion, has produced unrest instead of light, destruction instead of construction, and more than once set up evils worse than those it was out to remedy. No doubt ‘the Spirit (breaths) where he will’ (John iii. 8): ‘of stones He is able to raise men to prepare the way to his designs’ (Matt. iii. 9). He chooses the instruments of His will according to His own plans, not those of men. But the Founder of the Church, who breathed her into existence at Pentecost, cannot disown the foundations

as He laid them. Whoever is moved by the spirit of God, spontaneously adopts both outwardly and inwardly, the true attitude toward the Church, this sacred fruit from the tree of the cross, this gift from the Spirit of God, bestowed on Pentecost day to an erratic world.⁴

“In your country, (Brothers and Sisters), voices are swelling into a chorus urging people to leave the Church, and among the leaders there is more than one whose official position is intended to create the impression that this infidelity to Christ the King constitutes a signal and meritorious act of loyalty to the modern State. Secret and open measures of intimidation, the threat of economic and civic disabilities, bear on the loyalty of certain classes of Catholic functionaries, a pressure which violates every human right and dignity. Our wholehearted . . . sympathy goes out to those who must pay so dearly for their loyalty to Christ and the Church; but directly the highest interests are at stake, with the alternative of spiritual loss, there is but one alternative left, that of heroism. If the oppressor offers one the Judas bargain of apostasy he can only, at the cost of every worldly sacrifice, answer with Our Lord: ‘Begone, Satan! For it is written: The Lord (your) God shalt (you) adore, and Him only shalt (you) serve’ (Matt. iv. 10). And turning to the Church, he shall say: ‘Thou, my mother since my infancy, the solace of my life and advocate at my death, may my tongue cleave to my palate if, yielding to worldly promises or threats, I betray the vows of my baptism.’ As to those who imagine that they can reconcile exterior infidelity to one and the same Church, let them hear Our Lord's warning: - ‘He that shall deny me before men shall be denied before the angels of God’ (Luke xii. 9).⁵

“You will need to watch carefully, (Brothers and Sisters), that religious fundamental concepts be not emptied of their content and distorted to profane use. ‘Revelation’ in its Christian sense, means the word of God addressed to man. The use of this word for the ‘suggestions’ of race and blood, for the irradiations of a people's history, is mere equivocation. False coins of this sort do not deserve Christian currency. ‘Faith’ consists in holding as true what God has revealed and proposes through His Church to man's acceptance. It is ‘the evidence of things that appear not’ (Heb. ii. 1). The joyful and proud confidence in the future of one's people, instinct in every heart, is quite a different thing from faith in a religious sense. To substitute the one for the other, and demand on the strength of this, to be numbered among the faithful followers of Christ, is a senseless play on words, if it does not conceal a confusion of concepts, or worse.⁶

“It is on faith in God, preserved pure and stainless, that man's morality is based. All efforts to remove from under morality and the moral order the granite foundation of faith and to substitute for it the shifting sands of human regulations, sooner or later lead these individuals or societies to moral degradation. The fool who has said in his heart ‘there is no God’ goes straight to moral corruption (Psalms xiii. 1), and the number of these fools who today are out to sever morality from religion, is legion. They either do not see or refuse to see that the banishment of confessional Christianity, i.e., the clear and precise notion of Christianity, from teaching and education, from the organization of social and political life, spells spiritual spoliation and degradation. No coercive power of the State, no purely human ideal, however noble and lofty it be, will ever be able to make shift of the supreme and decisive impulses generated by faith in God and Christ. If the man, who is called to the hard sacrifice of his own ego to the common good, loses the support of the eternal and the divine, that comforting and consoling faith in a God who rewards all good and punishes all evil, then the result of the majority will be, not the acceptance, but the refusal of their duty. The conscientious observation of the ten commandments of God and the precepts of the Church (which are nothing but practical specifications of rules of the Gospels) is for every one an unrivaled school of personal discipline, moral education and formation of character, a school that is exacting, but not to excess. A merciful God, who as Legislator, says - Thou must! - also gives by His grace the power to will and to do. To let forces of moral formation of such efficacy lie fallow, or to exclude them positively from public education, would spell religious

under-feeding of a nation. To hand over the moral law to man's subjective opinion, which changes with the times, instead of anchoring it in the holy will of the eternal God and His commandments, is to open wide every door to the forces of destruction. The resulting dereliction of the eternal principles of an objective morality, which educates conscience and ennobles every department and organization of life, is a sin against the destiny of a nation, a sin whose bitter fruit will poison future generations.⁷

“Such is the rush of present-day life that it severs from the divine foundation of Revelation, not only morality, but also the theoretical and practical rights. We are especially referring to what is called the natural law, written by the Creator's hand on the tablet of the heart (Rom. ii. 14) and which reason, not blinded by sin or passion, can easily read. It is in the light of the commands of this natural law, that all positive law, whoever be the lawgiver, can be gauged in its moral content, and hence, in the authority it wields over conscience. Human laws in flagrant contradiction with the natural law are vitiated with a taint which no force, no power can mend. In the light of this principle one must judge the axiom, that ‘right is common utility,’ a proposition which may be given a correct significance, it means that what is morally indefensible, can never contribute to the good of the people. But ancient paganism acknowledged that the axiom, to be entirely true, must be reversed and be made to say: ‘Nothing can be useful, if it is not at the same time morally good’ (Cicero, De Off. ii. 30). Emancipated from this oral rule, the principle would in international law carry a perpetual state of war between nations; for it ignores in national life, by confusion of right and utility, the basic fact that man as a person possesses rights he holds from God, and which any collectivity must protect against denial, suppression or neglect. To overlook this truth is to forget that the real common good ultimately takes its measure from man's nature, which balances personal rights and social obligations, and from the purpose of society, established for the benefit of human nature. Society, was intended by the Creator for the full development of individual possibilities, and for the social benefits, which by a give and take process, every one can claim for his own sake and that of others. Higher and more general values, which collectivity alone can provide, also derive from the Creator for the good of man, and for the full development, natural and supernatural, and the realization of his perfection. To neglect this order is to shake the pillars on which society rests, and to compromise social tranquillity, security and existence.⁸

“The believer has an absolute right to profess his Faith and live according to its dictates. Laws which impede this profession and practice of Faith are against natural law. Parents who are earnest and conscious of their educative duties, have a primary right to the education of the children God has given them in the spirit of their Faith, and according to its prescriptions. Laws and measures which in school questions fail to respect this freedom of the parents go against natural law, and are immoral. The Church, whose mission it is to preserve and explain the natural law, as it is divine in its origin, cannot but declare that the recent enrollment into schools organized without a semblance of freedom, is the result of unjust pressure, and is a violation of every common right.⁹

“No one would think of preventing young (Americans) establishing a true ethnical community in a noble love of freedom and loyalty to their country. What We object to is the voluntary and systematic antagonism raised between national education and religious duty. That is why we tell the young: Sing your hymns to freedom, but do not forget the freedom of the children of God. Do not drag the nobility of that freedom in the mud of sin and sensuality. He who sings hymns of loyalty to this terrestrial country should not, for that reason, become unfaithful to God and His Church, or a deserter and traitor to His heavenly country. You are often told about heroic greatness, in lying opposition to evangelical humility and patience. Why conceal the fact that there are heroisms in moral life? That the preservation of baptismal innocence is an act of heroism which deserves credit? You are often told about the human deficiencies which mar the history of the Church: why ignore the exploits which fill her history, the saints she begot, the blessing that came upon Western civilization from the union between that Church

and your people? You are told about sports. Indulged in with moderation and within limits, physical education is a boon for youth. But so much time is now devoted to sporting activities, that the harmonious development of body and mind is disregarded, that duties to one's family, and the observation of the Lord's Day are neglected. With an indifference bordering on contempt the day of the Lord is divested of its sacred character, against the best of (American) traditions. But We expect the Catholic youth, in the more favorable organizations of the State, to uphold its right to a Christian sanctification of the Sunday, not to exercise the body at the expense of the immortal soul, not to be overcome by evil, but to aim at the triumph of good over evil (Rom. xii. 21) as its highest achievement will be the gaining of the crown in the stadium of eternal life (1 Cor. ix. 24).¹⁰

“Like other periods of the history of the Church, the present has ushered in a new ascension of interior purification, on the sole condition that the faithful show themselves proud enough in the confession of their faith in Christ, generous enough in suffering to face the oppressors of the Church with the strength of their faith and charity. May this holy time . . ., which preaches interior renovation and penance, turn Christian eyes towards the Cross and the risen Christ; be for all of you the joyful occasion that will fill your souls with heroism, patience and victory. Then We are sure, the enemies of the Church, who think that their time has come, will see that their joy was premature, and that they may close the grave they had dug. The day will come when the Te Deum of liberation will succeed to the premature hymns of the enemies of Christ: Te Deum of triumph and joy and gratitude, as the (American) people return to religion, bend the knee before Christ, and arming themselves against the enemies of God, again resume the task God has laid upon them.”¹¹

In closing, I would like to say that I really wish I could take credit for these words, but they are not my own. 90% of what I have shared with you is nothing new but was first written 76 years ago. Just as today, many think we are on the brink of World War III, these words were first written when we were on the brink of World War II. What I have shared with you today, comes from the encyclical: MIT BRENNENDER SORGE, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on the church and the German Reich. And yet, history seems to be repeating itself for the words I share from 76 years ago are clearly speaking to us today.

In this Fortnight of Freedom it is time for us to stand up and be a Faith FULL people, remembering the foundations of our country and fixing this situation before it is too late. I urge you to get on your knees and pray; offering your repentance for the sins of our country and begging God to forgive us and restore us to his favor.

1. Pius XI, encyclical, MIT BRENNENDER SORGE, 7

2. Ibid. 8

3. Ibid. 16

4. Ibid. 20

5. Ibid. 21

6. Ibid. 23

7. Ibid. 29

8. Ibid. 30

9. Ibid. 31

10. Ibid. 34

11. Ibid. 42