

I. IN TODAY'S GOSPEL WE ARE PRESENTED WITH THE EXAMPLE OF TWO PEOPLE PLEADING WITH JESUS FOR HELP

A. Jairus does so verbally – “Seeing [Jesus] he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him . . .”

B. The woman afflicted with hemorrhages does so with a silent act of faith – “If I but touch his clothes I shall be cured.”

C. The Bishops of our country have asked us to take these days between the vigil of the feast of Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More and our nation's celebration of Independence Day as days for special pleading with the Lord on behalf of our country

1. The Bishops of the United States have dedicated these days to a “great hymn of prayer for our country” and a “national campaign of teaching and witness for religious liberty”.

2. They have called it the Fortnight for Freedom

3. They are not asking us to side with one political party or the other

4. They are not calling for attacks on the person or the reputation of individuals serving in governmental positions in any branch of the government

5. They are exercising their appropriate role as teachers of the faith alerting us to dangers that are creeping into American society

6. And they are exercising their appropriate role as our spiritual leaders calling us into prayer at a critical juncture in our nation's history

II. I FIND IT INTERESTING THAT THE SPIRIT WORKING THROUGH THE CHURCH HAS PROVIDED US WITH TODAY'S FIRST TWO READINGS

A. The first reminding us that “... justice is undying.”

B. And the second reminding us “... as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality.”

C. As faithful and faith filled citizens we as Catholics in our country today need to be praying and working on behalf of principles upon which our nation was founded, including justice and equality

1. Justice

a) Giving to each person what is their due

b) As human beings from the moment of conception to natural death

c) Created in the image and likeness of God

d) With an immortal soul

2. Equality

a) Based on principles of natural law as taught by the Church's teaching tradition

b) Not contemporary societal constructs and redefinitions

D. Listen to some of the words of our Declaration of Independence

1. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

2. "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

3. "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

4. "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."

E. The destruction of our government is not at stake here

F. But praying that the Spirit guide our government through the murky waters of our day and time is our goal

G. In light of our founding documents

H. The First Amendment to our Constitution, the first of the so-called *Bill of Rights* reads

1. “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.”

2. Perhaps as a religious body under the leadership of our Bishops we are seeking such a redress in light of what appear to be recent encroachments upon our religious liberty

a) Primary among those unjust decrees is the mandate of the Department of Health and Human Services, which requires employers, including Catholic institutions, to violate the moral law by providing contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs in their health plans

b) Less noticed, but equally offensive to both Catholic doctrine and the constitution, is the determination by the government of what constitutes a religious institution

c) The HHS mandate grants an exemption to parishes, but it defines religious institutions in such a narrow way that it excludes, for example, Catholic universities, hospitals, food pantries, publishing houses, and social services

d) According to the HHS definition, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Knights of Columbus wouldn't qualify as religious institutions

e) Indeed, according to the federal rule, if we serve people who are not Catholic in our agencies, or educate them in our universities, or employ them in our institutions – we cease to be religious

f) If we provide for the needs of the sick and the poor, but don't ask whether they are Catholic or teach them catechism – we are not religious

g) That sounds like a clear violation of the Bill of Rights

h) Our first freedom is religious liberty, and the First Amendment explicitly forbids the government from establishing religion, which means that a government department doesn't get to decide what religion is, and what the proper work of the Church is

- i) *All of our vast charitable works, including health care, social services and education, exist because of our faith in Jesus Christ*
- j) *They are not optional extras, but essential*
- k) *As Catholics we care for the poor, the sick, the immigrant, the unemployed, the orphan, the expectant mother in distress, because of our faith*
- l) *The government seems to be claiming the right to restrict our religious life to the liturgy and doctrine.*
- m) *That is what is at stake in our current concern for religious liberty*
- n) *Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, reminded us that the works of charity are as essential for the Church's mission as is preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments*
- o) *The Catholic Church can no more abandon the sick in our hospitals or the immigrant at the border than she can set aside the inspired Word of God or our Eucharistic Celebration*
- p) *We cannot separate the fruits of faith from the faith itself*
- q) *The tree that does not bear good fruit is condemned by Jesus*
- r) *To definitively separate the fruit from the roots is to cut the tree down*
- s) *In the garden of American liberty, the government may not cut down the tree of faith*

III. WE PRAY FERVENTLY IN THIS FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM, WE PLEAD LIKE JAIRUS AND THE AFFLICTED WOMAN IN THE GOSPEL, TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE OF JESUS

A. And we pray that our government leaders will be faithful to the founding principles upon which our American society is built

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B. With genuine liberty and justice for all