

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

“Give me liberty or give me death.” These are the words of the patriot, John Patrick Henry. We are called to treasure, celebrate and protect the freedoms we exercise in our nation.

As we celebrate the Year of Faith, we remember the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. One of the Council documents, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, gives us important insight into our nation’s unique understanding of religious liberty. Cardinal Joseph Ritter played a central role in presenting this concept to the council and the Universal Church accepted it. The Council Fathers teach us that each person has the right to religious freedom and they explain what this freedom means. Our God given right to religious freedom means all men should be safe from bullying on the part of every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his faith. No one should stop a person from acting in agreement with his beliefs in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in dealings with others. (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*, no. 2).

We have heard the popular misunderstanding of the phrase “separation of church and state” to imply religion should be absent from public life and politics. The Founding Fathers of the United States pictured a nation and a government which would not impose a certain religion upon its people. They founded a nation where all peoples could freely practice their faith. We are called to treasure, celebrate and protect religious liberty and never surrender it.

As a Church, we have come across recent government rulings that fail to respect our religious liberty and our conscience in the *Health and Human Services* mandate. The Catholic Church, as well as other faith denominations and people in the private sector, have united. Together, we voice our opposition to such a command which violates our conscience and religious beliefs. The United States Bishops have called for a basic level of health care for all Americans. However, we do not support a dictate of the government’s will calling us to violate our conscience and religious beliefs by providing abortion drugs, contraceptives and sterilization in our health insurance plans. Like the patriot, John Patrick Henry, we are patriots when we protect and support the religious liberty of all peoples. We are called to treasure, celebrate and protect religious liberty and never surrender it.

May God who created us in love and to be truly free, bless our Church and all nations who treasure, celebrate and protect the principle of religious liberty!

Q. Do we daily thank God for the gift of our Catholic faith?

Q. When we celebrate our nation’s Independence Day on July 4, do we take the time to pray and renew our dedication to the freedoms we cherish, especially our most cherished freedom -that of religious liberty?

Reverend Monsignor Mark S. Rivituso, Vicar General

