



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

June 14, 2013

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The second annual Fortnight for Freedom is set to take place nationwide from June 21 (the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More) through July 4 (Independence Day). It is a call to fourteen days of prayer, action, and study regarding the serious threats to religious liberty we currently face. This year, the Fortnight for Freedom has special importance because of two particularly serious concerns:

First, the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule sometime in June on two key cases, DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act) and California's Proposition 8, regarding the protection and definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Second, the effective date of the HHS mandate, August 1, is quickly approaching. The HHS mandate, part of the Affordable Care Act, requires nearly all employers to provide in their employee health insurance plans, coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and contraception. Individuals, organizations, and businesses would be forced to either violate their conscience or face crippling financial penalties for failing to do so. Regrettably, this issue has taken on renewed urgency since even the latest proposed rule from the government does not expand the mandate's religious exemption, and offers little hope that this will change. This has serious implications for the future of the Church's ministries of education, health care, and charitable works. The bishops of the United States have made it abundantly clear that we cannot comply with an unjust law.

As a diocesan family we will come together in prayer to begin the Fortnight for Freedom on Friday, June 21 with Solemn Vespers at 7:00 p.m. at St. Paul's Cathedral. On July 1, we will have a Mass for the Protection of Religious Freedom at 7:00 p.m. at St. Stephen's Church in Worcester, followed by a presentation in the church hall on "St. Thomas More: A Model of Public Virtue for Our Time". I invite all the faithful to join in these two special diocesan events as well as to participate in whatever ways possible in your parishes and through your personal acts of prayer, charity, and sacrifice.

Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, precisely described the nature of religious freedom when he said, "Religious freedom is the pinnacle of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right. It includes on the individual and collective levels the freedom to follow one's conscience in religious matters and, at the same time, freedom of worship....Religious freedom is rooted in the dignity of the person; it safeguards moral freedom and fosters mutual respect." He also noted the increasing threats to religious freedom in America: "It is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States come to realize the grave threats to the Church's public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres ... Of particular concern are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion."

Let us take this opportunity to observe the upcoming Fortnight for Freedom by taking time for thoughtful reflection, faithful and courageous witness, and most of all, fervent prayer, that God will continue to shape our hearts and minds in conformity with His, and that our great nation will consciously maintain the God-given rights of religious liberty and freedom of conscience upon which it was founded.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester