

Archbishop Lori to Address Italian Observatory on Religious Liberty While in Rome for Pallium

In Rome to receive the pallium from Pope Benedict XVI on June 29, Archbishop William E. Lori, Archbishop of Baltimore, will address the first-ever meeting of the newly-created Observatory on Religious Liberty in Rome on June 28 at the Foreign Press Association. The group was formed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the City of Rome to assess religious freedom around the world.

The Archbishop, who chairs the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, was invited to speak to the group about the Catholic Church's efforts to curb religious freedom incursions in the United States, including the recent Department of Health & Human Services mandate.

Archbishop Lori will also speak about the Fortnight for Freedom, the U.S. Bishops' 14-day initiative to engage Catholics throughout the United States in prayer and educational activities surrounding the issue of religious liberty. The Fortnight began with a standing room only June 21 Mass in Baltimore and ends July 4 when churches throughout the country will ring their bells in a show of solidarity for religious freedom.

The Archbishop was invited to speak to the Observatory about his work for religious liberty because of his extensive work on the issue religious liberty in the United States. As Bishop of Bridgeport, he successfully defended the religious liberty rights of the Catholic Church against an attempt by state legislators to remove the authority of bishops and priests over their parishes.

More recently - as head of the Bishops' Committee on Religious Liberty - he has been a key voice in the debate over the U.S. Government's Health and Human Services Mandate - which seeks to force many Catholic institutions to provide insurance coverage for services including abortion inducing drugs, sterilization and contraception.

Following his speech, Archbishop Lori will celebrate Mass at St. Mary's Church in Trastevere, the titular church of Cardinal James Gibbons, ninth Archbishop of Baltimore. Upon taking possession of St. Mary's in 1887, Cardinal Gibbons issued what is still hailed today as a landmark speech promoting the ideal of Catholic-Americanism, and the perpetual assurance of religious freedom in the United States.

Entitled "Religious Liberty: God's Gift to all Nations is our Responsibility to Defend," the Archbishop's speech will be given Thursday, June 28 at 11:30 am at the Foreign Press Association - Via dell'Umiltà 83/C.

The pallium is a light vestment made of wool shorn from lambs blessed by the Holy Father on the Feast of St. Agnes, January 21. It is conferred each year on June 29, the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, on metropolitan archbishops—one who also has limited jurisdiction over one or more other dioceses— who were named in the past year.