

# Archbishop Lori's remarks at the Pre-World Youth Day Pilgrimage

*Pre-World Youth Day Pilgrimage  
Washington Monument, Washington, D.C.  
Aug. 25, 2018*

Well, here we are at the Washington Monument, named for the first president of the United States, George Washington. The monument is one of the most prominent landmarks in our nation's capital.

I hope you will forgive me, but as a resident of Baltimore, I must tell you that our nation's original Washington monument is in Baltimore. It's in a neighborhood called Mount Vernon, just up the street from where I live, and was built more than 200 years ago, in 1815, after the War of 1812.

Set on a stone base, it is a pillar that rises nearly 180 feet with a statue of George Washington on top. A few years ago it was beautifully restored.

I just thought you might like to know all of that!

But what about this, our nation's most recognizable Washington monument? It was built over many years and was completed only in 1889. It rises up some 555 feet and for a few years was the world's tallest structure.

Still today it is the world's tallest obelisk, a vertical column with a pyramidal top, an ancient form for monuments going back to ancient Egypt.

In 1852, when the Washington monument was under construction, Pope Pius IX, who was the Holy Father at the time, made a contribution - a very large block of limestone to the cause, called "the pope's stone."

But an anti-Catholic political party called the "Know-Nothings" destroyed it; some claim it now lays in the bottom of the Potomac River. We could go diving for it, but I'm told we don't have time today!

I might add that the Washington Monument underwent a major restoration after an earthquake in 2011 that weakened it structurally. Keep that fact in mind also for later reference.

Why, then, is this monument so important to the United States and indeed to many people in many parts of the world? And why did we stop here on our pre-World Youth Day pilgrimage? Let's spend just a few minutes thinking about those questions.

### **Why This Monument Is So Important to So Many**

The answer to the question, "why is this monument so important to so many" used to be obvious. People would say it honors George Washington, the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army that won our independence and the first president of the United States, the Father of our Nation, if you will.

A lot of people, however, simply don't know much history, so that's that!

Others tell us that Washington and some of our nation's founders didn't live up to the ideals in our nation's founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. For example, how could slavery have been the law of the land for so long?

Those who founded our nation were, like us, fallible people with blind spots. This is not to justify mistakes and moral blindness. It's only to say that even people who do great things are far from perfect.

George Washington and the founders of our country did something great. They created a great country which, in spite of its flaws, still strives to be a place of "liberty and justice for all" - and a place where fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech and assembly and freedom of religion are guaranteed - not only in laws but in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

These are among the most basic human freedoms. They are given to us not by any government but by God. These freedoms go to the heart of our human dignity. George Washington and our nation's founders never imagined that they were granting these freedoms to the citizens of this new country. No, they sought to

found a form of government in which these God-given freedoms would be protected and encouraged.

In other words, guaranteeing these freedoms is part of our country's DNA.

More than 230 years later, we might have a hard time imagining how truly revolutionary these ideas were at the time. We might also have a hard time imagining how important they remain to people all over the world whose basic freedoms are denied.

Our country is far from perfect, but to many it is a beacon of hope and freedom. That is one of the reasons why people from all over the world have come here and it is one of the reasons our country needs to have an immigration policy that is both just and compassionate.

I come from a family of immigrants and that's true of most of us. My grandfather came here from Sicily at the beginning of the last century because this is where he wanted to raise a family.

Our country also has to be welcoming to all life, especially the unborn, the vulnerable and the frail elderly.

George Washington and his colleagues also understood that it was not enough to guarantee those basic human freedoms in a document, not even one as important as the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. All of us have to strive to live up to these ideals and to use our freedoms wisely.

That is why George Washington told us, at the end of his long career that religion and morality are two essential pillars of democracy.

As young people with your whole lives ahead of you, I hope you will take to heart what George Washington said. Every generation has to secure its freedoms anew and every generation has to protect them, not merely by laws and policies, but above all by using those freedoms well and wisely.

Just as the Washington monument needed to be repaired after the earthquake, so too the moral fabric of our nation constantly needs to be repaired and strengthened.

This is one of the things you and I owe to Caesar – that is to say, to our civil government and to the wider society.

I'm getting older and while I'm still trying to fight the good fight you are the ones who are called to build what St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis have called “a civilization of love” – a society that is good, just, welcoming and compassionate.

### **Why This Monument Is So Important to Us as Followers of Christ**

Why, then, is this monument so important to us as followers of Jesus and as members of the Church?

Actually, it's Jesus who tells us the reason for its importance when he says, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what belongs to God” – that is, do duty and meet your obligations as a citizen. At the same time, give to God what belongs to God.

So, it seems, being a good citizen and being a good Catholic go hand in hand. But, as you might guess there's a little more than that to the story.

When you think about it, what doesn't belong to God? What do we have that we didn't receive from God?

The coin we use to pay taxes (I wish I could pay my taxes with a coin!) – has the image of Caesar, the leader on it.

But we human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. It's the human person who bears in his or her soul the stamp, the likeness of God.

And, so what the Lord is telling us is that we owe everything to God. Our happiness, our fulfillment, lies in giving everything back to God, not just what we have but our very lives. And we give our lives back to the Lord when we worship him, when we strive to lead good and virtuous lives, embrace whatever vocation we are called to, and when we serve the poor and vulnerable.

Day by day, that is how we give ourselves back to God. And guess what? By giving ourselves back to God we become the kind of people who are capable of creating a

society that is just and compassionate. By giving ourselves to God we become capable of giving to Caesar what justly belongs to Caesar. We become good, virtuous, compassionate people and good citizens, who are willing to sacrifice for our freedoms, to use them wisely, and to put these gifts of God at the service of others.

George Washington said that religion and morality are the pillars of a free society. May we heed his words by giving our all to God so that we might give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar!

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!