

Fortnight for Freedom: Archbishop Lori urges faithful to work for 'holiness of freedom and freedom for holiness'

"The future must have seemed so bright to Thomas More and John Fisher," Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori said June 21, the vigil of the English martyrs' shared feast day and the first day of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Fortnight for Freedom, an annual observance highlighting the importance of religious liberty.

In his **homily** for the Fortnight's opening Mass, celebrated at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, Archbishop Lori described an England which "seemed to have been spared the painful divisions that racked the Catholic Church on the continent of Europe."

The reigning monarch, Henry VIII, was declared "a defender of the faith," the archbishop noted, and "monastic life and learning were flourishing" while "ordinary Catholics showed their love and loyalty to the church."

"Who could have imagined the severe test More, Fisher and English Catholicism would face in so short a time?" asked Archbishop Lori, chairman of the bishops' religious liberty committee.

The aforementioned saints of the 1500s - respectively, the lord high chancellor and the bishop of Rochester, both of whom had enjoyed peace and security as they faithfully lived their vocations - lost their heads for refusing their assent to the "defender of the faith" when he declared himself head of the church.

While the West has not recently executed anyone for refusing apostasize, the archbishop borrowed Pope Francis's phrase - "polite persecution" - to describe the burdens placed on schools, hospitals, employees, employers and other individuals

and institutions that live and act according to their faith while navigating civil society.

Such fines, firings and threatened denials of accreditation indicate “kinship, solidarity with those suffering overt persecution round the world,” Archbishop Lori said.

Groups including the Catholic Business Association, Legatus, the St. Thomas More Society and the Catholic Medical Association expressed the same solidarity with their presence at the Mass and involvement in Fortnight for Freedom.

“This kind of shows, to everybody, that we have to act on what we believe,” said Dr. Okan Akay, who recently completed his residency in internal medicine and had his hands blessed by Archbishop Lori following the Mass. “It strengthens us in our ability to provide healing for people without having to go against what we believe in.”

Akay said there is increasing pressure in his line of work for those who would opt out of prescribing contraception or performing an abortion, for example. He was lightly mocked, he added with a shrug, for attending the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.

Interestingly, it was an overt display of faith – ashes on foreheads – that initially drew Akay, a former Muslim, now a basilica parishioner, toward the Catholic Church.

The opening Mass was **livestreamed** on the Catholic Review’s Facebook page and broadcast nationally on the Eternal World Television Network.

Anne Marie Gallo, a rising seventh-grader at Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson, was honored by Archbishop Lori following the Mass for her first-place essay in the archdiocese’s Fortnight for Freedom Essay Contest.

In her essay, she expressed her joy in freely exercising her faith at her Catholic school.

“When I started school at NDP I immediately fell in love with it,” wrote Anne Marie,

who had previously attended public school and was hurt by the lack of opportunity to pray when her father was ill.

At NDP, she wrote, “My religion was celebrated at Masses and events. I finally felt like I could express my Catholic faith freely with others.”

That expression included works of charity, such as making sandwiches for Sarah’s Hope, a shelter on Reisterstown Road for homeless families operated by St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, a Catholic nonprofit organization.

“They were all so thankful for our contribution,” Anne Marie wrote, adding that such works have a very specific impetus:

“Service is what Jesus told us to do before he died, which is to ‘love one another, as I have loved you.’”

Archbishop Lori noted that some have advised that Christians “withdraw from the fray.”

While he acknowledged the importance of rest and spiritual renewal, he once again turned to St. More and St. John Fisher, and urged Catholics to develop in their hearts “the holiness of freedom and freedom for holiness – an irrepressible spirit of freedom, courage and mission that no earthly power can take away from us.”

“Then we shall be truly free,” the archbishop said. “Then we shall be true missionary disciples.”

Bishops Adam J. Parker and Mark E. Brennan, auxiliary bishops of Baltimore, and Bishop Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop emeritus of Baltimore, as well as seminarians, deacons and priests of the archdiocese attended the Fortnight Mass.

The Fortnight for Freedom ends July 4. Archbishop Lori will celebrate another Fortnight Mass July 3 in Orlando, Fla., for the Convocation of Catholic Leaders.

Also see:

National effort on religious liberty seen helping state advocacy on issue

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