

Maryland Day 2015

It is a joy for me to welcome all of you this morning to the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Assumption, our Nation's first Roman Catholic Cathedral, for the celebration of Maryland Day. I warmly greet and welcome Henry Conley Pitts, Scott Watkins, and all the members of the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Maryland various regiments in our State, our ecumenical and interfaith guests, as also representatives of the Native-American and African-American communities. We are gathered to remember and give thanks for the founding of Maryland and for Lord Baltimore's vision of religious toleration.

Last December I was invited by Lord David Alton and the Christian Heritage Society in England to visit various sites in England connected with the founding of Maryland and its history prior to the Revolutionary War. It was an invitation I was honored and delighted to accept, for I found myself tracing the footsteps of those whose legacy we celebrate this morning.

Among the places I visited was Wardour Castle which was purchased by Sir Thomas Arundell of Langherne in 1544. The ruins of the old castle look much as they did when a certain Father John Carroll, who would become the 1st Bishop of Baltimore and the 1st Roman Catholic Bishop in the United States, visited the Arundell family and served briefly as chaplain in the new Wardour Castle where I was privileged to offer Holy Mass. Not far from the Wardour Castles is Hook Manor, where indeed members of the Arundell family continue to reside. It is said to date from 1637 and was the home of Cecil Calvert, 2nd Lord Baltimore and his wife, Ann Arundell, who were married in 1628. Among its features is a plaster ceiling with images of the Ark & the Dove, the small ships that brought 150 brave souls, including Leonard Calvert, across the Atlantic Ocean to St. Clement's Island where they disembarked and the Jesuit Priest, Fr. Andrew White celebrated Mass on March 25, 1634, the Feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady, a new marking in the Catholic faith a new beginning for humanity itself.

While in England I also visited Stonyhurst College which is the lineal successor to St. Omar's College in Liege, France, where both John Carroll and his cousin Charles Carroll matriculated.

In these and other visits, I felt a certain spiritual closeness with those who brought to the shores of our beloved Maryland a newfound and developing sense of the God-given gift of religious freedom. Founding a colony where that gift would be recognized by law was, to be sure, an experiment with many ups and downs, but it is difficult to imagine the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution without the vision, bravery, and sacrifice of those who went before us. Indeed, today we have no idea how great were their sacrifices.

Among those are the three individuals who were buried in the church yard of the Jesuit Chapel in St. Mary's City, which has now happily been reconstructed, including Philip Calvert, the son of the 1st Lord Baltimore and his wife Anne Wolseley Calvert. I remember well the day when Ben Bradlee came to see my old boss, Card. James Hickey, former Archbishop of Washington, to seek his support for the restoration of the original chapel at St Mary's City. How happy I am to know that a Cross from the last Liberty Tree in the United States is on its way to Pope Francis in advance of his historic visit to the United States, one of three modelled for the tabernacle of the restored Jesuit Chapel.

Looking out upon the world of today, we see many in the Middle East, Africa, and other places who are being persecuted and even killed because of their faith. Their courageous witness should be a powerful reminder of our own history and prompt us to redouble our efforts to keep the flame of religious liberty bright in the State of Maryland and in these United States... especially in a time when an aggressive secularism seeks to impose limits and even sanctions on churches that seek only the freedom to bear witness and to serve the common good in accord with their deepest held beliefs. True to the vision of Cecil Calvert, let us remember the words of President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, when he said that religious freedom is granted 'not by the generosity of the government but by the hand of God!' Thank you and God bless you.