Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (OF) and the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (EF), 30 June and 1 July 2012; Given at Holy Rosary Church; Indianapolis, IN

My friends, this will be my last Sunday sermon as your administrator. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve you in this capacity. Please take to heart all that I wrote in this week’s bulletin letter. I meant every word of it. As Monsignor always said, we are all in the hands of Divine Providence.

In the Name… We are well into what is known as the Fortnight for Freedom. Ever since last Wednesday (actually a day early), we have been praying the Prayer for Religious Liberty at every Mass celebrated in this church. True, there was a hiatus at the beginning of last week. I had to attend the archdiocesan Convocation of Priests down at St. Meinrad Archabbey. I left last Sunday and rode down to St. Meinrad with Monsignor Schaedel, his associate, Father Jegan Peter, and Father Sean Danda, soon to be former associate at St. Barnabas. So, there were no noon Masses Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. I returned in time to celebrate Mass Wednesday evening, so we resumed the prayer either after homily or at the end of Mass. We priests prayed this same prayer every day down at St. Meinrad as well, either before or after morning and evening prayer. We’ll keep this up through the Masses on July 4.

The prayer is quite rich if you look at it closely, and reflects in a nutshell all of the ink that has been invested in documents by the USCCB and all of the bytes used up in internet communications, as well as Youtube airtime – and that for better or worse.

I recently received a message from one of our parishioners that included a TV commentary – carried on Fox, mind you – which featured a self-righteous lady who thought she could add her two cents to the rest of the nonsense broadcast these days about that nasty, horrible Catholic Church. Turns out, of course, that despite her smug smile that induced feelings of nausea in your administrator’s stomach, her two cents weren’t worth even that much – despite how much that video must have cost.

The lady, a certain Julia Sweeney, spoke for thirty seconds on “Freedom FROM Religion” playing the same old dirge that we’ve been hearing a lot lately, you know the one about the Catholic Church trying to force it’s doctrines on the rest of the poor, unsuspecting world. What was really funny was that, though she admitted to being a non-believer, she referred to herself as a “cultural Catholic.” She’s the type that would, no doubt, utter the four most dreaded words I occasionally have to hear – either, *I was baptized Catholic* or *I was raised Catholic*. As soon as someone says those words to me, I know that Catholicism has no place in that person’s life.

I couldn’t resist answering FOX myself and did a bit of unpacking of that term *culture* for them – and for Ms. Sweeney too, but since FOX probably deleted my mail after reading the first few words, I doubt that Ms. Sweeney got a chance to read my pithy phrases. Though I thought of many other things I could have and should have said as soon as I clicked ‘send,’ here’s what FOX got from me: “How you could give any credence, support and airtime to someone who admits that she's a non-believing "Catholic" (and therefore, someone with a sinister agenda) and at the same time she admits that she's a "cultural Catholic" simply boggles the mind. She contradicts herself with every syllable of her nonsensical opinion. The word 'culture' comes from the Latin 'cultus' - which reaches far beyond traditions, mores, customs and the like. Cultus means 'cult,' i.e., religion, belief, doctrine, defined dogmas, liturgical practices, etc., which bleed into and profoundly influence the communal life of a given group of people.” So, if this "spokesperson" really knew what she was speaking about, she would not have made such a fool of herself in front of the world - on your normally sane television program! The word 'lies' doesn't begin to describe the injustice she commits against the Catholic Church.

This segues quite nicely into what the US bishops have been hammering home recently, and that is the premise that it is definitely NOT the Catholic Church who is trying to force Her views, doctrines, commands – or whatever people want to call them – on society, government or politics. It is the exact opposite. It is the government that is trying to impose something on the Church, something that it has absolutely no power to do – to force the Church (and other religious entities who hold the same position) to do something in total violation and contradiction to Her beliefs and teaching. The Church would never presume, never be foolish enough to attempt to force society and the world to adhere to Her teachings or to impose Her will on society. She has no power to do so. This is NOT to say that She has no moral authority nor that she would not wish to bring all of the earth’s children under Her mantle. But She cannot force –after all, force implies denial of free will and, then, of course, of love itself. She would never want to do such a thing. But, she cannot allow Herself to be violated, especially in view of the constitutional laws that have protected Her status since the beginning of this country’s history!

What was made clear to those who attended the Bishops’ Mass and reception for the Equestrian Order of the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre, by Bishop Doherty of Lafayette, is that this whole present mess is not merely a question of Freedom of Worship. That’s one of the slight-of-hand tricks being used to dupe non-thinking or non-informed (or possibly non-practicing Catholics who really don’t care about the situation at all) into believing that the government **isn’t** really doing anything wrong, dishonest or, heavens, illegal. But make no mistake about it. There is a gaping chasm between Freedom of Worship and Freedom of Religion (or Religious Liberty). The former is certainly implicit in the latter, but the latter is like a mountain where the former is merely a pebble.

The Holy Father was very clear when he spoke to the US bishops on their January *ad limina* visit: “Of particular concern are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion. Many of you have pointed out that concerted efforts have been made to deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholic individuals and institutions with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices. Others have spoken to me of a worrying tendency to reduce religious freedom to mere freedom of worship without guarantees of respect for freedom of conscience. Here once more we see the need for an engaged, articulate and well-formed Catholic laity endowed with a strong critical sense vis-à-vis the dominant culture and with the courage to counter a reductive secularism which would delegitimize the Church’s participation in public debate about the issues which are determining the future of American society.”

Archbishop Lori of Baltimore extends the theme in his address to Congress: “This is not a matter of whether contraception may be *prohibited* by the government. This is not even a matter of whether contraception may be *supported* by the government. Instead, it is a matter of whether religious people and institutions may be ***forced*** by the government to provide coverage for contraception or sterilization, even if that violates their religious beliefs.” It’s a shame that Ms. Sweeney, though she, no doubt, considers herself a well-informed authority on the situation, missed out Bishop Lori’s testimony when she was doing her “research” for her enlightening TV spot. By the way, if you haven’t read Archbishop Lori’s Parable of the Kosher Deli, you must.

The document from the USCCB, “Our First, Most Cherished, Liberty” states: “What is at stake is whether America will continue to have a free, creative, and robust civil society – or whether the state alone will determine who gets to contribute to the common good, and how they get to do it... Restrictions on religious liberty are an attack on civil society and the American genius for voluntary associations.” These convictions are not just those of Catholics. They are the principles echoed by Methodist and Episcopal bishops, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and a host of Protestants of every stripe. The bishops state that, “This is not a Catholic issue. This is not a Jewish issue. This is not an Orthodox, Mormon or Muslim issue. It is an American issue.”

We should ask ourselves a very painful question: What has become of the American, the typical American who, despite his often painful and embarrassing flaws, was a model of the philosophical principles of his country? What has become of the American who used to say, “I know what the right thing is and I’m going to do it.”? What has become of the American who risks his life for an ideal? True, we still have Americans who will risk their lives for their country, but, what is their country except the exemplification, vivification and embodiment of the principles that founded it?

What we will be dealing with in the not too distant future is a fundamental injustice, i.e., an objective evil, that very well may achieve the status of law. What will that make of the entire legal system? A web of lies, a fabrication of inconsistencies and contradictions. Why do I say ‘will?’ Because if this happens, when it happens, a juggernaut will be born that, as it increases in strength due to its not being challenged, will **overrun and do everything in its power to destroy us**. I’ve seen it coming for decades. We all have. Political correctness, over the years, has been gradually applied as the wallpaper for his nursery. Unbridled egalitarianism and manipulative non-judgmental“ism” are his crib and bath. Tolerance, in a basely misguided sense, is his bottle formula.

Even though he was a victim of grave injustice, it is none other than Martin Luther King Jr. who can give us much needed food for thought. In his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” he wrote, “I would agree with Saint Augustine that “an unjust law is no law at all.” Now what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.”

I wish you all a Happy and thoughtful Independence Day. In the Name…