Day 13 ★ July 3, 2013

Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

These reflections and readings from the Vatican II document Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae) *are intended for daily use during the Fortnight for Freedom, a national campaign designated by the U.S. Catholic bishops for teaching and witness in support of religious liberty. The readings and the questions that follow can be used for group discussion or for personal reflection.*

In turn, where the principle of religious freedom is not only proclaimed in words or simply incorporated in law but also given sincere and practical application, there the Church succeeds in achieving a stable situation of right as well as of fact and the independence which is necessary for the fulfillment of her divine mission. This independence is precisely what the authorities of the Church claim in society.

At the same time, the Christian faithful, in common with all other men, possess the civil right not to be hindered in leading their lives in accordance with their conscience. Therefore, a harmony exists between the freedom of the Church and the religious freedom which is to be recognized as the right of all men and communities and sanctioned by constitutional law.

Declaration on Religious Liberty
(*Dignitatis Humanae*), no. 13
December 7, 1965

Reflection for Day Thirteen

While insisting upon the religious freedom of the Church, the Council Fathers do not wish to give the impression that in some manner the Catholic Church is special when it comes to religious liberty. Thus, the Council first states above that where the principle of religious liberty is present, the Church is able to peaceably fulfill her divine mission. It is this amicable relationship between herself and civil authorities that the Church always wishes to pursue and ensure.

In the light of this, the Church also champions the religious and civil rights of all so that all people can live "their lives in accordance with their conscience." In this way there is no conflict with what the Church demands for herself and what she demands for others—the freedom to follow one's conscience in matters religious. This religious freedom for all is what the Council once more believes should be acknowledged and sanctioned within the constitutional law of countries.

In the United States, religious freedom is protected in the Constitution, as the Council desires. Are those constitutional protections enough? Are they growing stronger or weaker in our society today? What else, apart from the law, can strengthen or weaken religious liberty? What should Catholics do to defend and foster religious liberty in America today? What have Catholics done in the past when religious liberty was threatened?

JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013

FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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