

Bishop asks for prayers for religious liberty, marriage, family

Kristi Anderson, The Visitor (July 3, 2015)

Bishop Donald Kettler presided at a prayer service and holy hour June 28 at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud to mark the "Fortnight for Freedom," a two-week period of prayer and education focusing on protecting religious liberty and the role of faith in public life.

The Fortnight began June 21 and concludes July 4. This year's theme focuses on the "freedom to bear witness" to the truth of the Gospel.

"I certainly am here to lead and facilitate prayer for religious freedom here in our country and throughout the world," Bishop Kettler said during the prayer service. "But I am also here to ask for your prayers that I will guide and teach according to God's will and plan."

He said his prayer for religious freedom centers around three truths: that God is the creator of the universe and has a plan for all of his creation that needs to be recognized and followed; that each human being created in God's image has a basic and equal dignity and value; and, that Catholics observe God's wish that all humanity care for the common good.

"Everything I talk about this afternoon is based on the dignity of every human being, God's greatest creation," he said. "Every one of us was made in God's image and likeness. Every person regardless of race, creed, color, age, gender or sexual orientation has dignity and is loved unconditionally by God. We are to love and respect all of our brothers and sisters without exception."

There is an "unbreakable connection" between family and marriage, he added, and marriage is the cornerstone of every family.

"The truth about marriage is written into the complementarity of men and women based on their sexual and reproductive differences," he said. "Marriage does not exist just for the material satisfaction of two people. It exists primarily for the betterment of the world, for the betterment of society and to provide future generations with human life."

Supporting marriage

Referencing Pope Francis, Bishop Kettler said every child has a right to be raised by two parents — a father and a mother.

"Both parents are important and they are not interchangeable," the bishop said. "Children have a basic right whenever possible to know and be loved by their mother and father together. Civil law ought to support this basic right."

Although not all families are able to provide all of the elements of family, and although some families are headed by same-sex couples, he said, all families deserve everyone's love, respect, compassion, sensitivity and pastoral care.

"We must respect the human dignity of both those that support the Supreme Court's decision and those who do not approve."

The Supreme Court handed down a 5-4 decision June 26 saying same-sex marriage is constitutional nationwide.

"This ruling does not and cannot change what marriage really is," Bishop Kettler said. "This redefinition does have an impact on our First Amendment right to religious freedom. It can place

God's plan for marriage and family in opposition to the law and create conflict between the state, religious people and many societal institutions."

Bonnie Winkelman, a parishioner of Sacred Heart in Sauk Rapids, attended the prayer service because, she said, "It is such an important aspect of our faith to have the freedom to pray, to practice our faith and to worship openly."

Patricia Strang, a member of St. Anthony Parish in St. Cloud, attended the service with her granddaughter.

"We need to have a living faith in the public square. It's what we are thankful for and we hope that gift continues," Strang said. "And as the Bible says, 'Where two or more are gathered in my name, then am I in their midst.' "

Strang prays daily for religious freedom as part of her litany of prayers. "It is also good to get together as a group, as a community. That's why I brought my granddaughter, so she knows where to go for strength when she needs it."

"There is strength in numbers," Winkelman agreed. "And to have a deep faith. In the Gospel of John it says, 'In the world we will have trouble, but take heart, I have conquered the world.' "

Bishop Kettler called for the church to continue to preach the truth.

"Our allegiance to God demands that we bear witness to the truth about marriage as a union of one man and one woman together for life and open [to] the possibility of passing human life on to our children and our children's children," he said.

And, we must bear similar witness "to the truth about the dignity of all human beings from conception to natural death; the truth about the need to feed the hungry, to comfort the sick, to welcome the immigrants; and the truth that none of this can happen without the protection of religious liberty," he said.

(From <http://visitor.stedio.org/bishop-asks-for-prayers-for-religious-liberty-marriage-family/> (July 6, 2015))