

National Catholic Prayer Breakfast 2016

Opening Remarks

Thank you for inviting me to this remarkable gathering, in the company of such a distinguished audience.

As you well know, what happens in the United States has repercussions everywhere. The entire globe looks to you, waiting and praying, to see what America resolves on the pressing challenges the world faces today. Such is your influence and responsibility.

I do not say this lightly, because we find ourselves in such portentous times.

1. *The Situation of the World and the Mission of the Church*

Rapid social and economic development in the past half century has not been accompanied by an equally fervent spiritual progress, as we witness what Pope Francis calls “globalized indifference.”¹

It is the result of giving in to the delusion that we are self-sufficient, that man is his own measure in a pervasive individualism. It is manifested in the fear of suffering in our societies, our closing our eyes and hearts to the poor and vulnerable, and, in a very despicable way, in how we discard the unborn and the elderly.

When he prophetically announced the Second Vatican Council in the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis*, Saint John XXIII remarked that

¹ Pope Francis, Address in Lampedusa, 8 July 2013: “The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference.”

the human community was in “turmoil” as it sought to establish a new world order where humanity relies entirely on technical and scientific solutions instead of God.²

Today we are witnessing the next stage – and the consummation – of the efforts to build a utopian paradise on earth without God. It is the stage of denying sin and the fall altogether. But the death of God results in the burial of good, beauty, love and truth. Good becomes evil, beauty is ugly, love becomes the satisfaction of sexual primal instincts, and truths are all relative.

So all manner of immorality is not only accepted and tolerated today in advanced societies, but even promoted as a social good. The result is hostility to Christians, and, increasingly, religious persecution.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the threat that societies are visiting on the family through a demonic “gender ideology,” a deadly impulse that is being experienced in a world increasingly cut off from God through ideological colonialism.

Saint Pope John XXIII observed in 1962:

“Tasks of immense gravity and amplitude await the Church, as in the most tragic periods of her history. The Church must now inject the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel into the veins of the human community.”³

This remains the challenge that the Church is facing presently, more even than in 1962, and it is our task today. This is what I spoke of in my book *God or Nothing*:

“Today the Church must fight against prevailing trends, with courage and hope, and not be afraid to raise her voice to denounce the hypocrites, the manipulators, and the false prophets. For two

² Pope John XIII, Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis*, 25 December 1961: “Today the Church is witnessing a crisis underway within society ... the effects of a temporal order that some have wanted to reorganize by excluding God.”

³ Pope John XXIII, in Walter M. Abbott, S. J., ed. and trans., *The Documents of Vatican II: All Sixteen Official Texts Promulgated by the Ecumenical Council 1963-1965* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 703-707.

thousand years, the Church has faced many contrary winds but at the end of the most difficult journey, the victory was always won.”⁴

2. The Family

“The future of the world and the Church passes through the family.”⁵ These prophetic words of Saint John Paul II show how the Church, in our time, must, above all, defend and promote the beauty of the Christian family in fidelity to God’s design. In his post-synodal Exhortation on the Family, *Amoris Lætitia* (“The Joy of Love”), Pope Francis states clearly: “In no way must the Church desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage, God’s plan in all its grandeur ... proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being.”⁶ This is why the Holy Father openly and vigorously defends Church teaching on contraception, abortion, homosexuality, reproductive technologies, the education of children and much more. In my first five years as Archbishop of Conakry (Guinea, Africa), I made it my task to dedicate all of my pastoral letters to the family. Perhaps only the beauty of the family can reawaken the longing for God in the innermost recesses of the conscience of our brothers and sisters, and heal the wounds inflicted on our humanity by sin.

Saint John Paul, the Pope of the new evangelization, describes in *Familiaris Consortio* how the family is the first place where the Gospel is welcomed and is also the first herald of the Gospel. How true this is!⁷

The generous and responsible love of spouses, made visible through the self-giving of parents, who welcome and nurture children as a gift of God, makes love visible in our generation. It makes present the perfect charity

⁴ Robert Cardinal Sarah, “God or Nothing. A Conversation on Faith with Nicolas Diat” (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2015), 158.

⁵ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 75.

⁶ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia* (March 19, 2016), 307.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*: “By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are through the witness of their lives the first heralds of the gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them into the Body of Christ—both the eucharistic and the ecclesial body—they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life, but also of the life that through the Spirit’s renewal flows from the cross and resurrection of Christ” (39).

of the Trinity. “If you see charity, you see the Trinity,” wrote Saint Augustine.⁸

From the beginning of creation, God, who is a communion of persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three different Persons, yet one – has built a Trinitarian structure into our very nature. In the continent of my origin, Africa, we declare: “Man is nothing without woman, woman is nothing without man, and the two are nothing without a third element, which is the child.” The Triune God dwells within each of us and imbues our whole being: God’s own image and likeness.

Every human being, like the persons of the Trinity, has the capacity to be united with other persons in communion through the *vinculum caritatis* – the *bond of charity* – of the Holy Spirit. The family is a natural preparation and anticipation of the communion that is possible when we are united with God. The family, as it were, is a natural *praeparatio evangelica* – written into our nature.

This is why the devil is so intent on destroying the family. If the family is destroyed, we lose our God-given, anthropological foundations and so find it more difficult to welcome the saving Good News of Jesus Christ: self-giving, fruitful love.

St. John Paul explained: if it is true that the family is the place where more than anywhere else human beings can flourish and truly be themselves, it is also a place where human beings can be humanly and spiritually wounded.

The rupture of the foundational relationships of someone’s life – through separation, divorce or distorted impositions of the family, such as cohabitation and same sex unions – is a deep wound that closes the heart to self-giving love unto death, and even leads to cynicism and despair.

These situations cause damage to little children through inflicting upon them a deep existential doubt about love. They are a scandal – a stumbling block – that prevents the most vulnerable from believing in such love, and a crushing burden that can prevent them from opening to the healing power of the Gospel.

⁸ *De Trinitate*, VIII. 8, 12: CCL 50, 287

Advanced societies, including – I regret – this nation have done and continue to do everything possible to legalize such situations. But this can never be a truthful solution. It is like putting bandages on an infected wound. It will continue to poison the body until antibiotics are taken.

Sadly, the advent of artificial reproductive technologies, surrogacy, so-called homosexual “marriage”, and other evils of gender ideology, will inflict even more wounds in the midst of the generations we live with.

This is why it is so important to fight to protect the family, the first cell of the life of the Church and every society. This is not about abstract ideas. It is not an ideological war between competing ideas. This is about defending ourselves, children and future generations from a demonic ideology that says children do not need mothers and fathers. It denies human nature and wants to cut off entire generations from God.

3. Religious Freedom

I encourage you to truly make use of the freedom willed by your founding fathers, lest you lose it. In so many other countries, on almost a daily basis, we hear of merciless beheadings, futile bombings of churches, torching of orphanages and ruthless expulsions of entire families from homes that religious minorities suffer worldwide simply because of their beliefs. Even in this yet young twenty-first century of barely 16 years, one million people have been martyred around the world because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

Yet the violence against Christians is not just physical, it is also political, ideological and cultural. This form of religious persecution is equally damaging, yet more hidden. It does not destroy physically but spiritually; it demolishes the teaching of Jesus and His Church and, hence, the foundations of faith by leading souls astray. By this violence, political leaders, lobby groups and mass media seek to neutralize and depersonalize the conscience of Christians so as to dissolve them in a fluid society without religion and without God. This is the will of the Evil One: to close Heaven ... out of envy.

Do we not see signs of this insidious war in this great nation of the United States? In the name of “tolerance,” the Church’s teachings on marriage, sexuality and the human person are dismantled. The legalization of same

sex marriage, the obligation to accept contraception within health care programs, and even “bathroom bills” that allow men to use the women’s restrooms and locker rooms. Should not a biological man use the men’s restroom? How simpler can that concept be?

How low we are sinking for a nation built on a set of moral claims about God, the human person, the meaning of life, and the purpose of society, given by America’s first settlers and founders! God is named in your founding documents as “Creator” and “Supreme Judge” over individuals and government. The human person endowed with God-given and therefore inalienable rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” George Washington wrote that “the establishment of Civil and Religious Liberty was the motive that induced me to the field of battle.”

Today, we find ourselves before the battle of a sickness that has pervaded our world. I repeat: the battle of a sickness. That is what we face. I call this sickness “the liquidation, the eclipse of God.” Pope Francis describes the causes of this “sickness.” I quote:

“Religious liberty is not only that of thought or private worship. It is freedom to live according to ethical principles consequent upon the truth found, be it privately or publicly. This is a great challenge in the globalized world, where weak thought – which is like a sickness – also lowers the general ethical level, and in the name of a false concept of tolerance ends up by persecuting those who defend the truth about man and the ethical consequences.”⁹

What are the remedies to this sickness? What should we do to protect the family, religious freedom, and marriage – as revealed to us by God?

Concluding Remarks

Before such a distinguished gathering, I offer three humble suggestions.

⁹ Pope Francis, Address to the International Congress organized by the Department of Jurisprudence of LUMSA, Rome, June 20-21, 2014.

1. First: *Be prophetic*. The Book of Proverbs tells us: “*Where there is no vision, discernment, the people perish*” (29, 18). Discern carefully – in your lives, your homes, your workplaces – how, in your nation, God is being eroded, eclipsed, liquidated. Blessed Paul VI saw that in 1968 when, for the Church, he so courageously wrote *Humanae Vitae*. What are the threats to Christian identity and the family today? ISIS, the growing influence of China, the colonization of ideologies such as gender? How do we react?
2. *Be faithful*. This is my second suggestion. Specifically for you, as men and women called to influence even the political sphere you have a mission of bringing Divine Revelation to bear in the lives of your fellow citizens. Uphold the wise principles of your founding fathers. Do not be afraid to proclaim the truth with love, especially about marriage according to God’s plan, just as courageously as Saint John the Baptist, who risked his life to proclaim the truth. The battle to preserve the roots of mankind is perhaps the greatest challenge that our world has faced since its origins.¹⁰ In the words of Saint Catherine of Siena: “*Proclaim the truth and do not be silent through fear.*”
3. Third: *Pray*. Sometimes, in front of happenings in the world, our nation or even the Church, the results of our prayer might tempt us to become discouraged. Like Sisyphus in the Greek myth: condemned to roll a large boulder uphill, only to see it roll down again as soon as he had reached the top. Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* encourages us : “*People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone.*”¹¹

Whether in doctrine or morality or everyday decisions, the heart of prayer is to discern God’s will. This can only happen in prolonged moments of silence where, like Elijah before the horrendous threats of Queen Jezebel, we allow the “gentle breeze” of God to enlighten us and confirm us along our journey to do God’s will. Such was the virginal silence of the Blessed Mother. At a marriage, the wedding feast of Cana, when for a new family “they have no wine,” Mary our Mother trusted in the grace given by Jesus to bestow the

¹⁰ Robert Cardinal Sarah, *ibid*, 166.

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2006), 36.

joy of love overflowing – *Amoris Lætitia*. She pronounced her very last words, “Do whatever He tells you” (*John* 2: 1-12). Then she remained silent.

Be prophetic, Be faithful. Pray. That is why I came to this prayer breakfast. To encourage you. Be prophetic, Be faithful. And, above all, pray. These three suggestions make present that the battle for the soul of America, and the soul of the world, is primarily spiritual. They show that the battle is fought firstly with our own conversion to God’s will every day.

And so I wholly welcome this initiative, and join you in prayer that this great country may experience a new great “spiritual awakening”, and help stem the tide of evil that is spreading in the world. I am confident that your efforts will no doubt contribute to protecting human life, strengthening the family, and safeguarding religious freedom not only here in these United States, but everywhere in the world.

For in the end: it is “God or nothing.”

Thank you very much.