

Stand Up For Religious Freedom

Good afternoon! On behalf of James Terry Steib, Bishop of the Catholic Church of West Tennessee, I want to thank ALL of you for attending this second rally to Stand Up For Religious Freedom! Your presence here speaks volumes about your commitment to defending liberties guaranteed to us in the United States Constitution, and it also speaks well of your awareness of the threat to the liberty of ALL posed by our government's actions in its Health and Human Services Mandate on so-called "preventive health services".

As I prepared, and prayed, about today's rally, I was reminded of another chapter in North American history; a dark chapter; one that cost tens of thousands of faithful Mexican citizens their LIVES in defense of their religious liberties. This chapter reached its climax in the 1920's with the rule of Presidente Plutarco Elías Calles, who attempted to systematically destroy the Catholic Church in Mexico. He failed.

Lest anyone think that I intend to draw parallels between the Cristero Wars in Mexico and our current situation, let me say emphatically that *I am not doing so*. The martyrdom of those tens of thousands *has* no parallel in our country. The bravery and holiness demonstrated by people like Blessed Father Miguel Agustín

Pro, who was martyred by firing squad in 1927 simply for ministering to his flock, *have* no parallel in our current experience.

But in spite of the fact that no one is rounding up priests and pastors, religious freedom *is* under attack in our country! And it is *urgent* that *every one of us* who values our freedom to work and live according to our faith *stand up now* to say, “We will not comply. We WILL not comply. WE WILL NOT COMPLY!

Some would say, brothers and sisters that we are “overreacting”. Some would say that all of this rallying and speechifying and carrying on are a Tempest in a Teapot. *Some* would say that this is all politically motivated, because we somehow hate the President, or we just want to see him fail. But it isn’t so.

The Health and Human Services Mandate isn’t about access to contraceptives. It isn’t about freedom for women (oh, there’s a sermon in THAT little line there). It isn’t about *anything* other than a bold encroachment on the ability of ALL religious organizations and individuals to freely exercise their religion *in public life*. The HHS mandate is so narrowly drawn that my parish’s Catholic school is not exempt. It is so narrowly drawn that Associated Catholic Charities is *not* a religious organization. It is so narrow that Franciscan University of Steubenville, and the...wait for it...*Catholic University of America* are not exempt.

And the mandate forces all of these institutions, and others, against their conscience to pay for things they consider immoral. The mandate *forces* coverage of sterilization. It forces coverage of abortion-inducing drugs and devices. In a word, it is WRONG. And yet, we are expected to just lie down and accept it, because any changes to its provisions are “off the table” according to those who speak for our president. Well, I am here to say that, as the Church, with all its associated pieces and parts: “WE WILL NOT COMPLY”.

It isn't as if this is a “conservative Catholic problem”, either. Catholics of all persuasions, and many other religious and secular individuals and organizations, are unified in their opposition to this mandate. We have heard/You will hear from others who oppose this inexplicable intrusion on our religious liberty. And they all support us in our determination: WE WILL NOT COMPLY.

This is NOT about our president, God bless him. This is NOT a Republican or Democrat issue. Religious Freedom in our country is *foundational*. The very first clause of the First Amendment reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;” what is hard to understand about that?

To our elected representatives and their appointees, I say: We love you. We'll pray for you, and we hope you will do what's best for our country. But be

clear: We will not comply. We will NOT sit idly by while our religious freedom is trampled.

WE WILL NOT COMPLY.

Virgen de Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, *pray* for us.

Thank you, God bless you, and God Bless the United States of America!