

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez for the
Mass for the Country at St. Luke Parish
Feast of St. John Neumann
January 5, 2013**

“Of the entire dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.” George Washington, September 17, 1796, to the people of America on his declining the presidency of the United States.

I welcome all of you this morning for the first Mass for our country celebrated here at St. Luke Parish with the relics of the Polish Martyr, Father Jerzy Popieluszko.

Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, DC has said that we are all afraid of terrorism but secularism is worse than terrorism. Secularism seeks to move the city away from God to create an artificial separation of the author of all blessings in the life of the city. There not be a mention of God in our schools, in our malls, in our gatherings, in our graduations, in our sports, that is the intent of the secularist. But our founding fathers such as John Adams and George Washington thought differently. For them religion and morality were indispensable to the political prosperity of our country.

Our country is founded in liberty. Liberty has a human right which is more than choosing among options, but freedom has a purpose, has a design, that we must choose according to the truth and what is good for our being and for others. That is why freedom is a gift of the creator and religious freedom is the most cherished liberty because it is so connected to conscience, that voice in the depth of our heart, given by the creator to all people to enable the creature to do the right thing; to do the proper thing which will lead the person to his or her happiness. Today, with the HHS Mandate, a religious freedom is challenged, because the implications of that government regulation leads us the people of faith to act not according to our conscience, but to act against religious principles that our part of our mortality. But we cannot compromise. At the present time it seems that values are negotiated but we cannot make relative what our true absolutes are in the depth of our hearts.

Religion and morality are indispensable support to political prosperity George Washington would say. Our morality and religion should not hinder our patriotism and our ability to lead constructively and participate actively in the life of our country.

Freedom is so closely related to a life of virtue. That is why our founding fathers mention a need to “pursue” happiness. For all creatures, sharing a common creator is what makes us all equal. It is not men who give us rights. We do not possess our rights because we say so or because a benevolent government allows us to have them. They are given by our creator for our own good.

Today the church celebrates St. John Neumann who was born in Czechoslovakia, but arrived in the early part of the 1800s to New York in pursuit of service as a priest. He desired to live his priesthood with true dedication and for that entered the order of the Redemptorist. He preached missions throughout the different states of the Northeastern United States. He was chosen as bishop of Philadelphia, a prestigious diocese at the time. God did great things in this immigrant

who, in less than eight years, built hundreds of schools and parishes. Today, here at St. Luke, we celebrate the beginning of an early learning school under the care of the Sisters of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family. I welcome the Sisters and I take notice of the joy of our families who feel so blessed that the Sisters have come to St. Luke for the Catholic education of their children. Our country has a future in the measure that it promotes morality and respects religion in the way that will attain happiness under God by building up a country of freedom and human rights.