REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT MIKE PENCE

AT THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC PRAYER BREAKFAST, June 6, 2017

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     THE VICE PRESIDENT:  Thank you all.  To Carl Anderson, to Archbishop Broglio, Mother Olga, Bishop Dorsonville, Secretary Nicholson, distinguished members of Congress, and honored guests, I am so honored to join you for the 13th Annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast.  Thank you all for being here.  (Applause.)

And it’s early in the day, but I promise you, he starts early.  (Laughter.)  And I bring greetings from my friend, a man who appreciates the extraordinary contributions of Catholic Americans, the 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump.  (Applause.)

Before I go much further, first and foremost, let me begin this morning by expressing the sorrow of our entire administration and all the American people for the horrific terror attacks this weekend in London and with word this morning of another terrorist attack in Melbourne, Australia.

Our hearts break for the families of the victims and the injured -- just the latest innocents to suffer at the hands of terrorists, joining those in Manchester, in Kabul, in Paris, in Istanbul, Brussels, Berlin, San Bernardino.  They have our prayers.  They have our unwavering resolve.

As the President said two nights ago, this bloodshed must end and this bloodshed will end.  (Applause.)

But to be with you today is deeply meaningful to me.  I’m truly honored to join this year’s National Catholic Prayer Breakfast.  My mom would be so proud.  (Laughter and applause.)

Since 2004, the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast has brought together leaders in the Church, leaders in public life, leaders from across the globe to live out Saint John Paul the Second’s call for a “New Evangelization”, and to rekindle the flame of faith that gives comfort to the weary and lights the world with its glow.  This honestly feels like coming home to me.  (Applause.)

I’m the son of two devout American Catholics, and the grandson and the namesake of an Irish immigrant and his wonderful wife.  And I just learned from Father Jenkins at Notre Dame, where I had the opportunity to speak, as Carl told you, that even though my official biography says I was raised in a large Catholic family, I’m actually from a mid-sized Catholic family -- only six children in the family I grew up.  (Laughter.)

The hymns and liturgies of the Catholic Church are the anthems of my youth.  The Bible says “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he’s old, he’ll not depart from it.”

I want to tell you as a young boy growing up in a small town in southern Indiana, my Catholic faith poured an eternal foundation in my life.  I did eight years of hard time at Catholic school.  (Laughter.)  The name Sister Rachel still sends a shiver down my spine.  (Laughter.)  Honestly, I was the beneficiary of an extraordinary Catholic education, went to public high school.  But that foundation continues to serve and inform me every day.

I was one of four boys and two girls.  But being one of four boys was very convenient for Father Gleason (ph), because he could call my dad in a pinch and have a full team of altar boys ready for any mass.  (Laughter.)  So we lost count of the number of times we were rousted from bed early at the Sunday because there had been cancellations.  But it was very special.

I was not only baptized in the Church, but I was confirmed, and I stand before you today as Michael Richard Christopher Pence.  (Applause.)

While my own faith journey has taken me and my family in a different direction, I want you all to know how much I cherish my Catholic upbringing and cherish the Church.  In fact, I just attended mass with my mom this weekend when we were in Chicago with family.

I really grew up with a front-row seat to the Catholic faith and all that it means to families and to communities.  It gave me a deep appreciation for the Church’s rich contributions to the fabric of American life.

The truth is Catholicism is woven deep into that fabric.  It gives America a vitality and vibrancy that inspires everyone who sees it -- to this very day.

Even from the hour of our nation’s birth, the Catholic Church was there.  The last signer of the Declaration of Independence to pass away was the only Catholic signer, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Maryland.

His cousin, John, served as the first bishop and archbishop of the Catholic Church in the United States.

What began as a trickle became a deluge in American history, as waves of Catholic immigrants -- like my grandfather -- from places like Ireland, from Italy, from Germany, and indeed, from across the wider world made landfall in America, drawn here by the promise of freedom, of opportunity, prosperity; and most of all, it was the freedom to practice their faith that is the birthright of every American.

And now our history books are filled with the names of the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church.  And as the Bible says, we recognize them by their fruits.  There are among us here today some distinguished men and women in public life, in public service who are emblematic of that contribution.  And I’m honored to be able to address you all.

American Catholics have built everything that matters in this country -- build families, build businesses, founded hospitals, ministered to the poor, become leaders in public life, established world-class institutions of higher education, and so many other countless contributions to America.

And maybe most importantly Catholics have worn the uniform of the United States of America in every conflict in American history since our nation’s founding.  (Applause.)

And American Catholics and their family continue to participate in our armed forces to this very moment.  At this very time in far-flung places in the world, men and women that have grown up in the heart of Catholic families are wearing the uniform and serving our country, and we honor them.

We also honor those who have served.  And would all those who are present here today who have worn the uniform of the United States of America, would those men and women please stand up and allow us to thank you for your service and putting teeth on your faith in defending our freedom?  (Applause.)

Thank you for your service.

Catholicism has made an indelible mark on the American spirit.  Your faith has moved mountains, and the Catholic Church and its millions of parishioners have been a force for good in our communities, large and small, throughout our land, throughout our history.

To all the great American Catholics gathered here, let me assure you this morning, bright and early at this prayer breakfast, American Catholics have an ally in President Donald Trump.  (Applause.)

President Trump stands for the religious liberty of every American and the right of our people of faith to live out your convictions in the public square.

President Trump stands with those who are persecuted for their faith around the world -- no matter the country they call home or the creed they profess.

And President Donald Trump stands with the most vulnerable -- the aged, the infirm, and the unborn.  (Applause.)

On the first count, I can assure you this President believes that no American should have to violate their conscience to fully participate in American life.  (Applause.)  And he has not just talked about it, he has taken action to protect men and women of faith in the public square.

Just last month, the Little Sisters of the Poor were at the White House, and on that day, I had the high honor to stand as President Trump signed an executive order to restore religious liberty in the public square.  I couldn’t have been more proud.  (Applause.)

As inspired as I was by the President’s actions, I was even more inspired by the Little Sisters of the Poor.  They took a big stand for faith and freedom, and they prevailed.  Would we give the Little Sisters of the Poor a big round of applause for the stand they took on behalf of all our faith?  (Applause.)

Speaking from the Rose Garden, President Trump declared in his words that the “federal government will never, ever penalize any person for their protected religious beliefs,” and he directed the Department of Justice to “develop new rules” to protect Americans of faith in the public square.

And I can promise you, President Trump will continue to fight to ensure that every American has the freedom to follow the dictates of their conscience and add their voices and their values to the beautiful tapestry of America’s national life.  (Applause.)

And this President stands for religious liberty in America and across the wider world.  Just last month, President Trump traveled across the Middle East and Europe, where I know he was deeply honored and moved to have the opportunity to meet with the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

The President and the Pope had a lengthy and meaningful discussion about issues facing our world, about how our nation and the Church can work together to address them -- especially the persecution of people of faith across the wider world.

In Saudi Arabia, only a few days earlier on the world stage, President Trump had condemned in his words, “the murder of innocent Muslims, the oppression of women, the persecution of Jews,” and he condemned “the slaughter of Christians” across the wider Arab world.  (Applause.)

This is a President who knows that terrorism is an existential threat to people of faith in countries around the globe.  Terrorist groups seek to stamp out all religions that are not their own, or not their version of their own, and believers of many backgrounds have suffered grievously at their hands.  And we acknowledge all of that loss and suffering.

But it seems that the practitioners of terror harbor a special hatred for the followers of Christ, and none more so than the barbarians known as ISIS.

That brutal regime shows a savagery unseen in the Middle East since the Middle Ages, and I believe ISIS is guilty of nothing short of genocide.  (Applause.)

In Egypt, we have just recently seen Coptic Christians martyred on their way to a monastery, bombs exploded in churches amidst Palm Sunday celebrations -- a day of hope transformed into a day of pain and suffering.

In Iraq, we see ancient churches demolished, priests and monks beheaded, and the two-millennia-old Christian tradition in Mosul virtually extinguished.

In Syria, we see Christian communities burned to the ground, women and children sold into the most terrible form of slavery.  Christianity faces unprecedented threats in the land where it was given birth and an exodus unrivaled since the days of Moses.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the great privilege of meeting with courageous leaders of the Syrian Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Catholic Church.  I heard one story after another from them about the horrors that their parishioners face on a daily basis.  But I also heard their resolve.  I heard a bishop speak about returning to his home parish in Mosul and celebrating Easter Sunday.  He said, there’s no roof on the church.  The walls are falling down.  But the anthems of faith rose.  It had to be a glorious service.

It’s heartbreaking to think that the Christian population in Syria alone has plummeted from 1.25 million to only 500,000 in just the past six years.  Whether in Mosul, in Iraq, or in Syria, the followers of Christ have fallen by 80 percent in the last decade and a half.  This must end.  This will end.  (Applause.)

Carl Anderson and the Knights of Columbus, let me just say thank you for your extraordinary work caring for the persecuted. And to Mother Olga, let me personally thank you for raising your voice on behalf of the victims of persecution in your homeland and across the Middle East.

And let me promise all of you:  This administration hears you.  This President stands with you.

Our administration is fully committed to bringing relief and comfort to the believers in that ancient land.  And under President Donald Trump, America will continue to condemn persecution of any faith in any place at any time.  We will confront it with all of our might.  (Applause.)

Protecting and promoting religious freedom is a foreign-policy priority of this administration.  And we will continue to work with this Congress to stand without apology for persecuted people of faith across the globe.  We will continue to stand with our allies and take the fight to the terrorists on our terms, on their soil until we drive the cancer of terrorism from the face of the Earth.  (Applause.)

And finally, let me say from my heart, it’s the greatest privilege of my life to serve as Vice President for President Donald Trump, but I couldn’t be more proud to serve as Vice President to a President who stands without apology for the sanctity of human life.  (Applause.)

Since day one of this administration, President Donald Trump has been keeping his promise to stand for life, and life is winning in America again.

In one of his very first acts in Congress, President Trump reinstated the Mexico City Policy to prevent taxpayer funding from organizations that perform or promote abortions abroad.   (Applause.)

And I’m proud to say the President recently expanded that policy to cover nearly $9 billion in foreign aid.

In January, our President personally sent me to speak -- I guess for the first time ever for someone in one of these positions -- at the annual March for Life.  (Applause.)

And I got to tell you the story.  I went to the March for Life that day, and I said the President sent me.  Some people might have thought I just said that.  But in fact, here’s how it happened.  We were talking earlier in the week about the calendar for the week.  And the President was informed that Prime Minister May was visiting from Great Britain, our cherished ally.  And so he was not going to be able even break away for a phone call, which had been the tradition of many Presidents since that day in 1973.

And I was standing in the Oval Office, and the President said, oh, well, I won’t be able to call.  And I said rather shyly, well, if I could help in any way.

And he said, really?  How?

And I said, well, they invited me, too.  (Laughter.)

And he looked up from his desk at the -- in the Oval Office.  And he said, they invited you to speak?

And I said, yes, sir.

And he said, have you done that before?

And I said, my family always went to the March for Life when I was in the Congress.  I’ve spoken, be glad to help.  (Laughter.)

And the President pointed his finger at me without hesitation and said, you go.  You go and you tell them we're with them.  (Applause.)

President Donald Trump stands with the men and women who stand for the sanctity of human life in America, and he always will.  (Applause.)

He’s actually taken even more action than I’ve mentioned thus far.  The President actually has empowered states to withhold federal funding from abortion providers, and I’m humbled to say that at the President’s direction, I had the privilege of casting the tie-breaking vote in the United States Senate that allows states to defund Planned Parenthood.  (Applause.)

And President Trump is appointing strong conservatives to the federal courts at every level -- men and women who will uphold the God-given liberties enshrined in our Constitution -- and that includes the newest justice to the Supreme Court of the United States, a man in the mold of the late and great Justice Antonin Scalia -- Justice Neil Gorsuch.  (Applause.)

My friends, life is winning in America.  Life is winning through the steady advance of science that continues to illuminate more and more when life begins.

Life is winning through the generosity of millions of adoptive families, who open their hearts and their homes to children in need.

Life is winning through the compassion of caregivers and volunteers at crisis pregnancy centers and faith-based organizations, like Project Rachel, that give hope and healing to women in cities and towns across America.

And life is winning in America because all of you have stood with those who stand -- from the Congress, to the White House, to statehouses across the land -- for the sanctity of human life.

I believe we’ve come to a pivotal moment in the life of our nation, and indeed, the life of the world.  The Catholic community in America has made an enormous difference in the life of this nation.

And at this moment, I urge you to continue to stand up, to speak out, to continue to be that voice for the voiceless that the church has been throughout its history, continue to be the hands and feet of our Savior, reaching in with love and compassion, embracing the dignity of all people of every background and every experience.

I urge you to continue to do the very things that we celebrate here this morning and to stand for the change that this nation so desperately needs, a change back to a safer America, a more prosperous America, an America standing tall in the world again for our values and our ideals -- standing with our allies and against our enemies.

But I ask you to do one more thing that I know that men and women of Catholic faith in this country do exceedingly well, and that is I ask you to remember to bow the head and bend the knee and to pray.  In these challenging times, I encourage you to take time every day to pray.

And I don't so much say to pray for a particular agenda.  Although I will tell you that the sweetest words the President and I ever hear are when people reach out at an event to grab a hand and say, “I’m praying for you.”  And we hear it a lot.  Men and women of the Catholic faith in this country and of every faith in this country are people of prayer.

I encourage you to redouble your efforts, but don't so much pray for a cause as for country.  I’ve always been drawn to what Abraham Lincoln said when he was asked once if he thought that God was on the side of the Union Army in our great Civil War.  Abraham Lincoln responded, “I’d rather concern myself more with whether we were on God’s side than whether God is on our side.”  (Applause.)

So just pray for America.  Pray for this country because America matters.

And when you pray, pray with confidence.  Because I truly do believe in these divided times where there is so much focus on what we disagree on, it seems, so much need for healing, that those ancient words inscribed millennia ago that Catholic Americans and all Christian Americans and all our Jewish friends have clung to throughout the thousands of years are still true today as the day they were expressed:  That if His people who are called by His name will humble themselves and pray, He’ll do as He’s always done throughout the long and storied history of this Church and this nation.  As the Old Book says, He’ll hear from heaven and He’ll heal this land -- this one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you very much for the honor of being with you today.  (Applause.)  Thank you for all the Catholic Church means to America.  God bless you and God bless the United States of America.  (Applause.)

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