

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year A) - July 4-5, 2026
7-5-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

This weekend we're celebrating our country's 250th anniversary of independence—a truly remarkable achievement. America was intentionally founded as “one nation under God,” and most of our founding fathers publicly acknowledged His divine authority and our country's dependence on Him. Speaking God's Name in public was, for almost all of our history, quite natural, expected, and widely accepted—but now doing so can often be controversial. A high school valedictorian was known to be a devout Christian, so he was warned by politically correct school officials in no uncertain terms that he was not to mention God in his speech, a restriction he and his classmates resented—so they came up with a plan. When it was time for him to speak, the young man stepped up to the podium, sniffed a little bit of black pepper he brought for the occasion, and then let loose with a huge sneeze. All the other graduates shouted in unison, “God bless you!,” and there was nothing the school officials could do.

Unfortunately, restrictions on religious liberty aren't always so easily bypassed. In Ohio an employee at a jewelry store lost her job merely for answering a co-worker's question about her faith in Jesus; a manager who happened to overhear this conversation fired her on the spot. Street preachers in Chicago and Atlanta were arrested for speaking about Jesus on public sidewalks. A dozen students and their chaperones from a South Carolina Catholic high school were ordered to leave the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C. because they were wearing hats with a pro-life message. A man wearing a “Jesus is the Only Way” t-shirt in the Mall of America was told either to take off the shirt, or leave, because it was offending people. A junior high student in Plainwell, Michigan was suspended for three days simply because he expressed his Christian beliefs in a private conversation in a school hallway. U.S. military personnel who've dared to speak about Christ have been accused of treason or called “enemies of the Constitution,” and a naval chaplain who publicly prayed in the name of Jesus was threatened with a court-martial and the loss of his pension.

Under the previous presidential administration, there was an effort to force Catholic doctors and hospitals to perform sex-change operations on children as young as seven years old. Also, FBI officials in Virginia circulated a memo identifying traditional Catholics as potential domestic terrorists. Last year the governor of Washington state signed a law requiring Catholic priests to violate the seal of the confessional under certain circumstances; however, the bishops of the state declared their priests would not obey this unconstitutional law, and the federal Department of Justice intervened on the Church's behalf. The Family Research Council documented 415 hostile acts against religion committed in 2024, affecting 383 Christian churches across the country. 68% of them involved vandalism, 13% were instances of arson, and 3% involved bomb threats. The U.S. Catholic bishops have also compiled a list of hundreds of attacks on Catholic churches and pro-life crisis pregnancy centers over the last few years. Most of these events are never reported in the mainstream media. Because we are patriotic, God-fearing citizens who cherish our nation's founding values, we automatically tend to assume this is true of all Americans—but unfortunately, this is far from the case. There are many people who hate Christ and His Church, and that's why Our Lord's words about taking His yoke on our shoulders are appropriate and prophetic. Following Jesus is becoming increasingly controversial—and yet, it is always necessary and the right thing to do.

II. Development

A yoke was a wooden harness that allowed two oxen or other beasts of burden to work together equally, efficiently, and in harmony while pulling a plow or other piece of farm machinery. Jesus uses this image to speak of discipleship, but with an important difference: if we submit ourselves to His authority and live as His followers, He will do most of the heavy lifting; that's why He states His yoke is easy, and His burden light. This sort of self-surrender makes no sense to those who are clever and learned in worldly things, but to the little ones—meaning those who are humble—Our Lord's promise contains a wonderful and liberating truth. The prophet Zechariah had foretold the coming of the Messiah in the humblest way imaginable, meek and riding on an ass, and today, as members of His Kingdom, we must live in this same spirit of self-denial. As St. Paul reminds us, we are not in the flesh, for the Spirit of the Lord dwells in us—and this means we must not let ourselves be deceived, tempted, or intimidated by the false and spiritually-destructive values of this passing world.

III. Conclusion

We as Americans like to believe that ours is the greatest nation in all human history, and there is much truth to this claim; despite grave and inexcusable sins such as slavery and racial discrimination, our noble achievements over the last 250 years have brought liberty and prosperity to hundreds of millions of people, and have inspired countless downtrodden and oppressed persons across the globe. However, for many decades now a fierce battle has been raging for our country's soul, and the outcome is uncertain. I confess that I sometimes feel discouraged when I look at the current state of society, including the vicious personal attacks that have become an inherent part of our political discourse, the fierce divisions and hatred that mark our politics today, and the unwillingness of many of our leaders to take necessary steps to ensure America's continued survival and well-being. We need the sort of heroes and patriots who've made a real difference over the last 250 years, but too often we instead have cowardly or calculating politicians and citizens who think only of their own self-interests.

However, we can't let ourselves off the hook; most Christians have been absent from the culture wars tearing apart the United States, and have not done enough to share the light of God's truth by their words and example. Too often we seem to think being humble means keeping quiet, and not fighting back when society attacks our religious values. Weakness of this sort is not an option for true followers of Jesus Christ. Yes, He was the humblest person Who ever lived, but He was also the morally strongest; He always spoke the truth, and would not compromise His beliefs, or cooperate with evil, in even the slightest way. Our Lord expects us to follow His example, taking upon ourselves the yoke of Christian discipleship in an increasingly anti-Christian world, standing up for what's right in the face of growing immorality, and bearing witness to God's divine authority in a world choosing spiritual blindness and rebellion. Living in such a manner is in fact the greatest service we can perform for our country today, and a way of following in the footsteps of the many great Americans whose sacrifices and legacy of patriotism our nation is quite rightly honoring.

An insert in today's bulletin offers some thoughts on what this might mean in a practical sense. Above all, we must always pray to the Holy Spirit to guide us and empower us in our efforts to find the true rest we need and seek by taking upon ourselves the yoke of Jesus.

AMERICA IN 2026: TAKING A STAND FOR JESUS

Christians are called to be salt for the earth and light for the world (Mt. 5:13-16)—and in today’s fiercely politically and culturally divided society, this mission is more important than ever. Here are some practical suggestions on how to bear witness to Jesus in an increasingly secular United States of America.

1. Become informed citizens and voters. According to the Michigan Catholic Conference, “Prior to voting, Catholics are called to form their conscience in accordance with Church teaching. . . . The themes presented in Catholic social teaching, originating in Scripture and further articulated through Church Tradition, are represented across the nine advocacy principles that guide Michigan Catholic Conference’s public policy advocacy. These principles are (1) upholding the dignity of human life; (2) providing for the poor and vulnerable; (3) welcoming immigrants and refugees; (4) protecting religious liberty; (5) supporting students, schools, and parents; (6) strengthening marriages and families; (7) improving access to healthcare; (8) pursuing restorative justice; and (9) caring for creation and preserving natural resources.” To learn more about these principles, visit cthl.cc/bftcg.

“The Church cannot and will not tell you *who* to vote for. Ultimately, those decisions are to be made after forming one’s conscience on the teachings of the Church and prayerful reflection of candidate positions. . . . Voting as a faithful citizen includes prayer, research, and discernment. It is a thoughtful rather than a reflexive approach. Remember: All believers are called to be salt, light, and leaven in the world, particularly when they allow the truths of the Catholic faith to form their voting decisions” (MCC *Focus*, Vol. 54, Summer 2026).

2. Bear witness to Jesus in a visible way. Begin each day by praying, “Lord Jesus, please give me some opportunity today to share Your love and truth; help me recognize it when it comes, and give me the courage and strength to act upon it.”

When you were baptized, you became a member of the Church—and this means you share in the Church’s mission of evangelization. Furthermore, when you were confirmed, you received the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude (Strength), Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. These Gifts are meant to be *used* in every day life, and they can help you know and do what the Lord wants of you in any given situation. Jesus promised that those who try to bear witness to Him will be given the right words to say (Lk. 21:15)—so we can afford to speak up in defense of our Christians values and beliefs in a calm, friendly, and respectful manner.

When out in public, make the Sign of the Cross whenever you hear a siren, or whenever you’re about to eat a meal in a restaurant. If someone begins gossiping about a third person, say, “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that; would it be okay if we said a prayer for him/her right now?” In any sort of tense, confusing, or difficult situation, silently pray, “Holy Spirit, please give me the right words to say,” and then speak in whatever way the Lord inspires you. If you feel afraid or intimidated, remember that fear is from the evil one, never from God; trust in the Lord, and He will sustain you. You may be the only witness to Christ someone else ever sees; be grateful for this opportunity to make a difference in his or her life!

3. Consider joining, or financially supporting, one or more of these (or similar) organizations:

a. *Alliance Defending Freedom* is “the world’s largest legal organization committed to protecting religious freedom, free speech, the sanctity of life, parental rights, and God’s design for marriage and family.” According to ADF, “While culture may change, truth does not. That’s why we pursue strategic victories that will bring lasting change in law and culture—together with a coalition of courageous clients, allies, advocates, and supporters.”

Alliance Defending Freedom 15100 N. 90th Street Scottsdale, AZ 85260
1-800-835-5233

b. *American Center for Law and Justice* is a Christian-based legal organization with headquarters in Washington D.C.; it is associated with Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The ACLJ is described as being “committed to ensuring the ongoing viability of freedom and liberty in the United States and around the world”; it seeks to protect “universal, God-given and inalienable rights” by focusing on “U.S. constitutional law, European Union law and human rights law.”

American Center for Law and Justice, P.O. Box 90555, Washington D.C. 20090-0555
1-800-342-2255

c. *The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights* is “the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church against defamation and discrimination. Annual membership dues are \$40. Senior citizen dues are \$25, and student dues are \$25. Members receive *Catalyst*, the league journal. . . . There are Catholic League members and supporters in every U.S. state and territory, as well as in a dozen foreign countries.”

Catholic League 450 Seventh Avenue, 34th floor, New York, NY 10123
1-212-371-3191

d. *Family Research Council* “is a nonprofit research and educational organization dedicated to articulating and advocating a family-centered philosophy of public life. In addition to providing policy research and analysis for the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government, FRC seeks to inform the news media, the academic community, business leaders, and the general public about family issues that affect the nation from a biblical worldview.”

Family Research Council 801 G. Street NW Washington, D.C. 20001
1-877-372-2808

e. *Focus on the Family* is an Evangelical Protestant organization founded in 1977 by the late Dr. James Dobson; its self-described mission is “Helping Families Thrive in Christ.”

Focus on the Family 8605 Explorer Dr. Colorado Springs, CO 80920-1051
1-800-232-6459