

Vice President Pence Explains How Catholicism Impacted His Own Faith

Tuesday morning, Vice President Mike Pence gave the keynote speech at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast held at the Washington Marriott Marquis in Washington, D.C.

During the speech, he touched on a number of subjects, including the recent terrorist attacks in London and Melbourne, Australia, but focused much of it on issues such as religious liberty and the pro-life movement. Near the beginning, as a point of introduction, however, he discussed how his family's Catholic background, and his own Catholic upbringing, helped lead him to where he is today.

The following is an excerpt from his speech:

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, 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 roused from bed early on 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.

After touching on the ways Catholicism has played a big role in our nation's history, the vice president also remarked about the many ways the Trump administration was working to advance issues that matter to Catholics and evangelical Christians. But, at the end of his speech, the vice president made a request of all those present:

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 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."

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. Thank you for all the Catholic church means to America. God bless you and God bless the United States of America. {eoa}