



*To the Participants in the
2026 Canterbury Medal Gala*

I extend my prayerful good wishes to those taking part in the 2026 Canterbury Medal Gala, organized by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. Your presence attests to your commitment to defending religious liberty as an integral part of upholding human dignity. The efforts undertaken in this regard acquire particular significance as the United States of America prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of its foundation. Indeed, we can recognize in the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence an expression of the truth regarding the human person. Namely, the innate dignity of every man and woman, created by God in his own image and likeness, and the rights that stem therefrom.

Life's experience demonstrates the openness of the human person to truth. From the candor of a child's incessant yet sincere questions, to the establishment of schools and universities, it is clear that we are naturally receptive to the world around us and driven by the desire to discover the ultimate truth of reality. For this reason, there are fundamental questions that pervade the lives of all, the most important of which are undoubtedly those concerning humanity's ultimate purpose, God and religion, for there is nothing that affects the human person more intimately.

It is within this context that religious liberty can be properly understood. Humanity's capacity to know the truth gives rise to a moral obligation, for men and women are thus "bound to seek the truth... embrace the truth they come to know and... order their whole lives" accordingly (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1-2). In matters of religion, ordering our lives in accordance with truth naturally entails not only the free acts by which we internally direct the course of our life toward God, but also the external expressions of religion in community (cf. *ibid.*, 3). Given, then, that every

person is bound to fulfill their religious duties, “the right to religious freedom is not optional but essential” (*Address to a Delegation of Aid to the Church in Need*, 10 October 2025). Individuals and governments are thus impelled to recognize the right to religious freedom and their duty to respect this right as “the cornerstone of any just society” (*ibid.*). To fail to do so would gravely impede the flourishing of the human person and undermine the integrity of society as a whole.

For over thirty years, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty has gone to great efforts to defend this right, to the benefit of both individuals and larger communities. By ensuring that all men and women are free to act in conformity with the dictates of their conscience and to practice their faith openly, without coercion or fear, you work to safeguard the inviolable dignity of the human person. Indeed, it is precisely in recognizing and defending this dignity that we can hope to establish a society that continues to promote the authentic development of every individual.

Dear friends, as you continue this noble task, it is my hope that every individual will embark upon the pursuit of truth sincerely and without fear. The Scriptures tell us that truth itself has a name, Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:6), and that God will undoubtedly aid those who search for him with all their heart (cf. *Jer* 29:13). In thanking you for your efforts now and in the future, I cordially invoke upon you and your families divine blessings of wisdom, joy and peace.

From the Vatican, 4 June 2026

Leo PP. XIV