

This morning we first thank God for the shared blessings of American liberty. Catholics have always known that a society built on respect for the religious beliefs of others would be a land where they could achieve and prosper.

When the French writer de Tocqueville visited these shores back in the 1830s, he noted that the most democratic country in the world was also the one where the Catholic religion was making the most progress. He called Catholics the most faithful believers in our land, yet also the most independent of citizens—[laughter]—as I've learned from dealing with Senator Santorum. [Laughter]

This morning we also reaffirm that freedom rests on the self-evident truths about human dignity. Pope Benedict XVI recently warned that when we forget these truths, we risk sliding into a dictatorship of relativism where we can no longer defend our values. Catholics and non-Catholics alike can take heart in the man who sits on the chair of Saint Peter, because he speaks with affection about the American model of liberty rooted in moral conviction.

This morning we pray for the many Catholics who serve America in the cause of freedom. One of them is an Army Chaplain named Tim Vakoc. He's a beloved priest who was seriously wounded in Iraq last May. We pray for his recovery; we're inspired by his sacrifice. In the finest tradition of American chaplains, he once told his sister, "The safest place for me to be is in the center of God's will, and if that is in the line of fire, that's where I'll be." Father Tim's sister, Anita Brand, and her family are with us today, and a grateful nation expresses our gratitude to a brave reverend.

Catholics have made sacrifices throughout American history because they understand that freedom is a divine gift that carries with it serious responsibilities. Among the greatest of these responsibilities is protecting the most vulnerable members of our society. That was the message that Pope John Paul II proclaimed so tirelessly throughout his own life, and it explains the remarkable outpouring of love for His Holiness at the funeral mass that Laura and I were privileged to attend in Rome. It explains why when the men were carrying his wooden casket up the

stairs and they turned to show the casket to the millions that were there, that just as the casket crests, the sun shown for all to see.

The best way to honor this great champion of human freedom is to continue to build a culture of life where the strong protect the weak. So today I ask the prayers of all Catholics for America's continued trust in God's purpose, for the wisdom to do what's right, and for the strength and the conviction that so long as America remains faithful to its founding truths, America will always be free.

Thank you for allowing me to come. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:42 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Leonard Leo, member of the board of directors, National Catholic Prayer Breakfast; Theodore E. Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington; Charles J. Chaput, Archbishop of Denver; Jose H. Gomez, Archbishop of San Antonio; Rear Adm. Louis V. Iasiello, USN, chief of Navy chaplains; and Carl A. Anderson, supreme knight, Knights of Columbus. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark and an Exchange With Reporters

May 20, 2005

**President Bush.** The Prime Minister and I will be glad to answer two questions per side.

First, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome back. It is so wonderful to see you. He's a good friend of mine. Denmark is a good friend of America. I appreciate your contributions to transatlantic ties. The Prime Minister has made very constructive and helpful comments to make sure that the transatlantic ties between the United States and Europe are strong. And I want to thank you for your leadership role.

I also appreciate your clear understanding about the historic times in which we live, times in which more and more people are

becoming free. I appreciate your strong support for those who desire to live in a democracy in Iraq. I thank you for your contributions to a new democracy called Afghanistan. I thank you for your very constructive work in helping the Palestinians develop a democratic state that can live side by side with Israel in peace.

So welcome back. It's good to see you, sir.

**Prime Minister Rasmussen.** Thank you very much, Mr. President. I'm delighted to be back in Washington. It's my fourth visit as Prime Minister, which underlines that the United States and Denmark are close friends and allies. We share the same fundamental values. We are allied in our efforts to promote freedom and democracy worldwide.

And I'm happy to say, in addition to this, that I appreciate very much your straightforward style. I consider you a friend, and I know that with you, I'll always have a very frank discussion and exchange of views. So I'm happy to be back.

**President Bush.** Fortunately, he's not that good a friend that I would go running with him. [Laughter] He's one of the best runners in the world, amongst the world leaders. He's a good one.

Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

### **Stem Cell Research**

**Q.** Mr. President, on stem cells, specifically, would you veto legislation that loosened the requirement on Federal funding for stem cell research? And secondly—

**President Bush.** Deb—

**Q.** —what is your reaction to the news about the South Koreans on embryonic—

**President Bush.** I'm—first, I'm very concerned about cloning. I worry about a world in which cloning becomes acceptable. Secondly, I made my position very clear on embryonic stem cells. I'm a strong supporter of adult stem cell research, of course. But I made it very clear to the Congress that the use of Federal money, taxpayers' money to promote science which destroys life in order to save life is—I'm against that. And therefore, if the bill does that, I will veto it.

### **Investigations of Prisoner Abuse**

**Q.** Mr. President, how do you react to the continuing reports about mistreatment of

prisoners held by American military around the world, and also the perception abroad that the ones that are paying for it are low-ranking soldiers but that nobody higher up is taking any responsibility?

**President Bush.** I think the world ought to be—pay attention to the contrast between a society which was run by a brutal tyrant in which there was no transparency and a society in which the whole world watches a Government find the facts, lay the facts out for the citizens to see, and that punishment, when appropriate, be delivered.

If I'm not mistaken, I think about over 20 percent of the people thus far that have been held to account as a result of the Abu Ghraib issue have been officers. There have been over, I think, nine investigations, eight or nine investigations by independent investigators that have made the reports very public. I'm comfortable that we're getting to the bottom of the situation, and I know we're doing so in a transparent way. Obviously, ours is a country that respects human rights and human dignity, and if those rights and dignity have been denied, we will hold people to account.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

### **Motivation of Terrorists**

**Q.** Sir, are you worried that the publication of the Saddam photo, along with the Newsweek story, will further inflame tensions and inspire the Iraq insurgency and anti-Americanism in the Middle East?

**President Bush.** I think the Iraq insurgency is inspired by their desire to stop the march of freedom. Remember, these are ideologues of—that murder innocent people in order to spread their dark vision of hate. And therefore, when light begins to show up in the form of democracy, it frightens them. There is no future for these haters in a free world. And so they're inspired by the fact that they see democracy emerging in Iraq. That's what causes them to want to kill. They're frightened by the fact—and inspired the wrong way, by the way—by the fact that Afghanistan is free. They're seeing the people in Lebanon demand free and fair elections. And their ideology cannot survive in a democratic society. See, the only way they

can survive is to—is to try to shake our will by killing innocent life.

And that's why our strategy in Iraq is to train the Iraqis so that they, themselves, can fight off these terrorists. Listen, 8½ million people went to the polls, in spite of the fact that the—people had been killed and there was incredible intimidation. And they defied the bombers. These people want to be free, and the killers don't want them to be free. And so our strategy is to help the Iraqis realize the dream of a free society. And when the Iraqi troops are properly trained—and we're headed in that direction—of course it will take less of a coalition effort to help this new democracy get started.

Yes, Steve.

**Q.** What about the Saddam photo? Does that have any—

**President Bush.** Well, you asked me whether or not that would inspire people. You know, I don't think a photo inspires murderers. I think they're inspired by an ideology that is so barbaric and backwards that it's hard for many in the Western world to comprehend how they think. But I would just remind people, if you want to know how ideologically grim their vision of the world is, just remember the Taliban. They said, "If you don't agree with our religious views, you'll be prosecuted. If you're a woman who seeks freedom, you'll be beaten." So these people are motivated by a vision of the world that is backward and barbaric.

#### **Timetable for Troop Withdrawal From Iraq**

**Q.** Mr. President, while the Danish people might support the war and appreciate the progress in Iraq, they're also curious when our soldiers will come back home. Can you elaborate on that?

**President Bush.** Well, I appreciate that question a lot, and of course I get asked that in our own country a lot. And my answer is, it makes no sense to set a timetable. And the reason why is, is because it will allow an enemy to adjust.

On the other hand, as I tell our folks, is that we would like to get our troops out as quickly as possible. And the definition of that will be how soon our commanders on the

ground think that the Iraqis are able to take the fight to the enemy.

I just got off of a video—which I'm looking to briefing the Prime Minister on—with General Casey, who is our general on the ground; he's the commander of the coalition forces. And he was describing to us the Iraqi training and the quality of training. And some units are in really good shape, and other units need additional work. But one of the things that's important to understand is the Iraqi Government understands that as civilian governments change, there needs to be stability in the military and a chain of command that links top to bottom. And General Casey knows we're making progress toward establishing that chain of command.

My answer to the Danish people is, as soon as we can possibly get it done. We've got to complete the mission. A free Iraq in the midst of the Middle East is going to be a powerful—a powerful agent for peace.

Listen, thank you all for coming.

**Q.** One more?

**President Bush.** We don't want to break precedent. Was that you, Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio], who asked that?

**Q.** It was.

**President Bush.** No. [Laughter] You know better than that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:48 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

#### **Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Konstandinos Karamanlis of Greece**

May 20, 2005

**President Bush.** Thank you all for coming. It's my pleasure to welcome the Prime Minister back. It's good to see you, sir.

America and Greece have got a strategic partnership. That's important. It's important for our respective peoples, and it's important we work together to spread freedom and peace.