News



Bishop William Byrne of Springfield, Massachusetts, gives the keynote address during the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington Feb. 8. (OSV News/Leslie E. Kossoff)



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Quoting at length from Pope Pius X and the 16th-century Council of Trent, Bishop William Byrne of Springfield, Massachusetts, also cited Dr. Anthony Fauci in his reflections on eucharistic piety during the 19th annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 8.

Mentioning a November 2023 BBC interview where Fauci, a baptized Catholic, said he does not attend Mass and instead relies on his own ethics to keep him on the right path, Byrne said: "If you're wondering why we need a Eucharistic Revival, Dr. Fauci explains it perfectly."

Byrne said that Fauci, the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, "succinctly articulates the voice of the majority of Americans who identify as Catholic but do not recognize the beauty and the power of their baptism."

Criticizing Fauci — a reviled figure on the right for his policy recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic — drew applause from the 1,000 people who attended the annual event in Washington, D.C.

Advertised as a nonpartisan gathering inspired by Pope John Paul II's call for a "new evangelization," the prayer breakfast has long echoed themes popular in right-wing media while featuring organizers, sponsors and speakers with conservative Republican credentials.



Attendees, including Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, right, pray during the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington Feb. 8. (OSV News/Leslie E. Kossoff)

Leonard Leo, the longtime chairman of the Federalist Society and conservative Catholic activist who has used his financial resources and connections to reshape the federal judiciary, sits on the prayer breakfast's board of directors.

The Eternal Word Television Network, the conservative Catholic media conglomerate, broadcast the event live and featured interviews with Catholics involved in pro-life work and litigation pertaining to religious liberty rights under the First Amendment.

During his opening remarks, Mark Randall, the event chairman and director of the prayer breakfast's board of directors, thanked sponsors that, along with the Knights of Columbus and the Pontifical Missions Society, also included CatholicVote, the conservative political nonprofit that in January endorsed Donald Trump for president.

Randall said the prayer breakfast was also being sponsored by the Heritage Foundation and its Project 2025 initiative, which seeks to reshape the executive branch of the U.S. federal government in the event that Trump or another Republican candidate captures the White House in 2024.

The Project 2025 plan aims to replace federal civil service workers — whom Trump often castigates as members of a liberal "deep state" — with those who would be loyal to the incoming Republican president and grant them total control over the executive branch upon inauguration.

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The prayer breakfast's closing prayer was said by Sr. Deirdre Byrne, a member of the Little Workers of the Sacred Hearts who spoke at the 2020 Republican National Convention while wearing her habit and proclaimed Trump to be "the most pro-life president this nation has ever had."

Sr. Byrne, a surgeon and retired army officer, spoke immediately after her brother, the bishop of Springfield, who was the event's keynote speaker. The bishop focused his remarks on renewing eucharistic devotion, which he said the U.S. bishops' National Eucharistic Revival is intended to accomplish.

"The Eucharistic Revival will culminate in the National Eucharistic Congress this summer; be there," Bishop Byrne said in referencing the upcoming July 17-21 gathering in Indianapolis.

The bishop also linked the Eucharistic Revival with what he said is a need for a "confession revival." He cited Pope Francis' maxim that the Eucharist is "not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak," but added that an "all are welcome" ethos does not mean "anything goes."

"That the Eucharist is a remedy for human frailty does not mean we needn't be prepared to receive communion worthily," Bishop Byrne said.



Nigerian Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe of Makurdi and Fr. Deji Dada Augustine of Ondo listen during the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington Feb. 8. (OSV News/Leslie E. Kossoff)

The event program also featured remarks from Nigerian Bishop Wilfred Anagbe of the Makurdi Diocese and Fr. Deji Dada Augustine, a priest of the Ondo Diocese in Nigeria. Both spoke about the violent attacks that Islamist forces have been waging on Christians in their country over the last several years.

"I share this with you so that the world may know that in spite of all of this, Nigerian seminaries and churches are full. The Christian faith is growing in spite of the terrorists, or maybe because of them," Anagbe said.

Helen Alvaré, a professor at the Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University, received the Christifideles Laici Award, which the prayer breakfast created in 2019 to highlight a recipient's good works. Over her career, Alvaré has used her legal skills to advise church leaders and to write and speak on matters pertaining to right to life issues, family life, and the First Amendment's religious

freedom clause.

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