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## The Supreme Court says Christian prayers at public meetings are OK

by Pat Perriello

NCR Today

The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 on Monday that public meetings can be opened with Christian prayers. As long as one does not denigrate another's faith or proselytize, such prayer is in keeping with long-standing tradition, the court ruled. I made my feelings clear in an earlier post, so I will not repeat what I said then.

I do think *The Baltimore Sun* presents some views that may be worthy of consideration.

I find particularly helpful their statement that "the court may have decided that Christian prayer before a local government meeting is Constitutional, but that doesn't mean it is unobjectionable." The editorial goes on to say that even though prayer may be constitutional, it would be best if it were not done.

Columnist Dan Rodricks also puts forth a hypothetical case that demonstrates how this ruling could produce unfair results.

My own feeling is that this is an unfortunate decision that I can probably live with. I am far more concerned about some potential decisions down the road that could be more damaging.

Why do I say that? I think the real danger in this decision is its potential for abuse. For the most part, if a brief prayer is said at the beginning of a public meeting and the name of Jesus is mentioned, most people may not find it terribly offensive. My fear is that this ruling may give some a reason to feel they have been given license to go beyond a simple ceremonial prayer.

I am reminded of my elementary school days in public school, where we said the Lord's Prayer every morning along with the Pledge of Allegiance. In my home town of Dunbar, W.Va., the Catholic

population was an intimidating 2 percent. The entire state had only a 5 percent Catholic population. We ended the prayer with the Protestant ending: "For thine is the kingdom," etc. Sister told us Catholics to stop praying at that point and to stand silently. I wonder what our Jewish classmates were supposed to do.

At any rate, the good people of my hometown never once denigrated my faith or made me feel uncomfortable. It just wasn't a big deal. If this ruling is exercised in the same way it was back home, it should not be an issue.

We did survive this onslaught to our faith. In fact, we survived until the point at which those words known as part of the Protestant Lord's Prayer were incorporated into our Catholic Mass.

So I think I can live with the court's erroneous decision. The real question is whether it is still a good thing to be considerate of the feelings and beliefs of those around us in a multicultural society.

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