

The Importance of Freedom of Religion

“The framers of our Constitution meant we were to have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.”

—Billy Graham

Freedom of Religion grants the ability to practice whatever religion you want, and worship whomever you choose without being punished. As an American, I have countless blessings but religious freedom is by far the most important to me. I am a holy Catholic, Christian and I can not imagine my life any other way. I absolutely love being able to attend mass every week and praise my God with prayer, song, and worship. It is hard for me to believe that somewhere in this world, there is a girl my age just dying to be free. She wants more than anything to pray in public safely, and practice whatever religion she wants. It pains me that some people don't get this wonderful opportunity.

Countries like Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria are currently restricted from practicing a religion of their choice. They are all forced to practice Islam. Some people living in these countries are killed everyday because they disagree with this rule. Every single prayer they say is a complete risk.

When discussing this serious topic, I cannot help but think about Malala Yousafzai. Malala is a sixteen-year-old girl living in Pakistan who has become a global symbol of a peaceful protest, and is the youngest nominee ever for a Nobel Peace Prize. When the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley in Pakistan, Malala refused to be silenced. She herself fought for girls' education, and was shot in the head because of it. However, she has now recovered and is stronger than ever. Malala continues to inspire

people all around the world with her peaceful actions, and her ability to take a stand. I will definitely be sure to keep her story in mind every single time I ever complain about having to go to school. Sometimes I may not want to get up early, or do my homework at night, but in the end I truly cannot imagine my life without it. I realize that there are people like Malala all over the world that would love more than anything to be able to go to school with their friends everyday and learn. Knowing this makes me feel very blessed.

“Some people only ask others to do something. I believe that, why should I wait for someone else? Why don't I take a step and move forward.”

— Malala Yousafzai

I simply cannot imagine my life without the freedom of religion. Without religious freedom I could not attend mass, or attend Holy Family Regional School. If I did not go to Holy Family I would not have been able to create all the long lasting friendships and bonds that I have had since kindergarten. Also, we would be unable to pray as a school community. Religious freedom truly is a blessing that is taken for granted way too often.

Freedom of religion is a very strong and serious topic that I hold close to my heart. Life would be extremely different without it, and far too many people do not realize this. So next time you complain about anything in life, step back and give the globe a spin. Things can always be so much worse. A long, vigorous war was fought to achieve my freedom, and I am so very proud to be an American. I am free.

“For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and

enhances the freedom of others.”

— **Nelson Mandela**