



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WEEKLY
from
Americans for Freedom of Religion

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**Our Lady of Victory
Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary: Oct. 7
Commemorating the Battle of Lepanto**

By: Fr. George W. Rutler

“Our faith is based, not on abstract speculation, but on historical events. The Church’s feasts are acts of thanksgiving for actions of God that have affected the course of human existence. On October 7, the Church celebrates the victory of Christian naval vessels over those of the Ottoman Muslims who outnumbered the Christians by more than two to one, and whose ships were manned by upwards of fifteen thousand Christian galley slaves.

“The Battle of Lepanto in 1571 was the greatest naval engagement until the Battle of Jutland in World War I, but it is not commemorated just as a lesson in the art of maritime war. The core of the feast is that it saved Christian civilization. Compared to it, July 4 and Waterloo and Gettysburg and D-Day are ancillary struggles to preserve what would not exist at all, had it not been for 1571.

“We revere the “Star Spangled Banner” whose broad stripes and bright stars gallantly streamed in 1814, but quite more remarkable was the banner held by Gianandrea Doria, great-nephew of the Admiral Andrea Doria, at Lepanto. It bore the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It has been preserved in the cathedral of Genoa.

“Had the battle ended differently, Sultan Selim could have fulfilled his vow to conquer Rome, turning the basilica of Saint Peter into a mosque, despoiling and upending its bells so that they might be filled with oil and burned in honor of Allah, as had been done in 997 at the tomb of Saint James in Compostela.

“We would not be here – nor would our holy religion, our universities, our science, our democracy, our enfranchised women, our justice, our social tolerance, and our entire moral fabric – were it not for Lepanto. The feast of its victory was instituted by Pope St. Pius V and, after the final defeat of the Ottomans in 1716 at Timișoara in present-day Romania... Pope Clement XI made it a universal feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

“Given the terrors of our present times, it would be well to pray the Rosary on October 7.”

Author: Fr. George W. Rutler, Pastor; Roman Catholic Church of St. Michael, NYC, October 2, 2016