



Homily for 9/6/2020

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time / 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Christians in the World

I had a thought yesterday, as once again the political season heats up. As Catholics, that is, baptized believers in the fullness of the Christian Faith handed on to us from Jesus through Apostolic Succession, we do not belong entirely to this world. While we are called to be good and active citizens of our present world, our true and ultimate citizenship is in heaven. That means that our highest law is not the law of the land we live in, but rather the Law of the Kingdom of God. This law is summed up in one word: Love. Not love in the sentimental emotional sense that so often masquerades as true love these days. Rather, the love that is the Law of the Kingdom of God as defined by Jesus Christ on the cross. The love that wills the good of the other even to the point of self-sacrifice. The problem we are facing in our society today is that Christians, who are supposed to be the salt, light and leaven in this world, have not always kept this higher citizenship and its higher law in mind. It is to be expected that the world will eat its own. Why is this happening even within the Church? Left to itself, fallen humanity is filled with so many deadly vices: hatred, jealousy, rivalry, envy, greed, lust and all the fleshly allurements. If you look at the political discourse all around, we find these types of vices in abundance, even more so, these days. And the Church and her members are caught up in this, too. This seems to ramp up in our society every time we have a presidential election. We begin a war of words and rhetoric that is full of accusation and condemnation. There are outright errors and falsehoods being touted as the latest “cause” for our righteous anger. Then there are those who demonize others because they see the world in a different way. This is the way of hatred that leads to death. So I had this thought about the dilemma of the Catholic today: On the one hand we must reject error and falsehood. On the other we must reject hate and vitriol. The problem is that in most cases we are seemingly presented only with those two options to choose from. I reject both.

So how do we as Catholic Christians engage society without falling into its vices? Divine Love is the answer. If we really love someone, we are obliged to call them back from self-destruction. Error and falsehood lead to destruction. We have an obligation to call out wrongdoing and to speak words of Justice. But before we speak, we must root out hatred. We need to be motivated by love, not pride: correction of the sinner that he may live, not condemnation of the sinner, that he may die. We also need to do a healthy self-examination. First we must seek personal justice towards our God and Creator who reveals himself to us. This is in answer to the first commandment, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul.” The second is like the first, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We must live in justice with our neighbor, in accord with what God wants for this neighbor, not just what he wants for himself. As recipients of Divine Wisdom, we claim to know the truth about the human condition and how we are to live in harmony with our God and our fellow man. This is called the moral life. However, so many people reject this revelation and demand that we tolerate their error. I speak not only of the rampant sexual sins that have overgrown our society, but also the hatred that has filled the hearts of many, leading to things as mutually opposed as the Antifa movement and the KKK. They are opposite in the extremes of their hatred but eerily united in that same vicious cycle of destruction. Tolerance has its limits and as Christians we need to be clear about it. We tolerate people, but we can never tolerate error. As Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, “Tolerance is an attitude of reasoned patience toward evil ... a forbearance that restrains us from showing anger or inflicting punishment. Tolerance applies only to persons ... never to truth. Tolerance applies to the erring, intolerance to the error ... Architects are as intolerant about sand as foundations for skyscrapers as doctors are intolerant about germs in the laboratory. Tolerance does not apply to truth or principles. About these things we must be intolerant, and for this kind of intolerance, so much needed to rouse us from sentimental gush, I make a plea. Intolerance of this kind is the foundation of all stability.”



We are obliged to an intolerance of error. This is the origin of the Christian obligation to fraternal correction out of love of God and neighbor. The first reading declares it: “when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.” The Gospel says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault”. But even in the Gospel it goes on to give us a process to do it with charity. Unfortunately, as a society we are doing a bad job of this. Even the Christians are failing in this, first because we easily forgot that we are citizens of heaven and are too swayed by the world; and second, because we have forgotten how to use our God-given reason to have rational debates where we discipline our emotions in favor of higher things for love’s sake. We are self-destructing as a society because of the noise and clamor of empty rhetoric without love. We hear so many sentimental and emotional arguments that accomplish nothing. For instance, for God’s sake, don’t be an Internet troll responding to every tweet and comment on Facebook. I recommend saying a decade of the Rosary for every comment you make on Facebook! I guarantee that would change the world one heart at a time!

Emotions and sentiments are running amuck without reason and wisdom to discipline them, and this is causing us to be easily manipulated by the forces who know how to pluck these emotional strings for political gain. As Catholic Christians, we must resist this temptation and return to our role as salt, light and leaven, to be citizens of a heavenly kingdom first whose law is true love of God and neighbor; and with this firm eternal outlook, to then be the good citizens of our land of exile. You will know they are Christians by their love.

As Catholic Christians, we must be the first to reclaim a place for principled debate in our society and to model it for all. I can’t say that I have all the answers. But I have at least one insight that I would share with you. To truly love, we have to be open to the other. Before we can will his good, we have to know the other. We can’t love what we don’t know. I would suggest that the first thing that we need to do, in order to know, is to listen. As Christian people, we are called to be people who listen first and speak second. This requires a level of silence that this world rebels against. So our first subversive act in the enemy-occupied territory that we find ourselves in is to listen in silence.

First, we need to listen to the voice of God. If we are not dedicating quality time on a daily basis to the art of listening to God that we call prayer, we will never find peace in our souls or in our world. To that end, I would like to recommend to you a new app that has come out, called “[Hallow](#).” You can find it on most any smart phone. If you have never learned to pray and just need someone to take you by the hand and show you how to pray, download this app and do the introduction sessions. Even if you have lots of experience talking to God in the many vocal prayers we learn as children, there is so much more to the rich tradition of prayer we have inherited as children of the Kingdom of God. This app will teach you to form the habit of listening in prayer, rather than just talking. This is the first step.

Second, we need to listen to the Church. So many people think that they know what the Church teaches about the major issues of our days. Yet they have never once opened a book or studied the catechism. I would invite you to locate the [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church \(available online\)](#) and start reading what exactly the Church says about our role in the life of society and the way the Gospel of Jesus Christ forms our outlook and perspective as social creatures, ultimately made for communion with God. You might be surprised by what you find there. We will also be offering at the Basilica, before the election this fall, an online presentation and discussion on forming our consciences in the voting booth. We will be using as our starting point the Bishops’ document on [Faithful Citizenship](#).

Third, we need to listen to each other. Listening is an art that requires a lot of self-restraint. To listen without trying to formulate a response is a hard skill to acquire. We have to be careful of having too ready an answer to every situation. I have often fallen into the trap myself, of assuming what the question is and giving a useless answer to an unasked question. How often do we make assumptions and jump to conclusions? This happens so often when we enter into political discourse. We don’t always listen to what the other person is saying. We need to listen to the cry



of the poor and the suffering; to listen to the little ones who don't have loud voices. To listen even to our enemies and hear their grievance before we respond to them. In fact, that is one of the essential parts of hearing confessions for a priest. The penitent must confess his sins out loud to a priest. Thus, in the confessional, I become the ear of God hearing the cry of the poor. The open ear, hearing the brokenness of humanity. When we are heard by God, then we are forgiven. When we are forgiven, then we are called to go and do likewise. We need more open ears and closed mouths in our social discourse these days. This is the only way to peace.

So, as we enter the heated political season that is upon us, let us take up the charge to once more be the light, salt and leaven in a world so desperately in need of the wisdom of God. Let us be faithful citizens of heaven first and in this way, we will be the best citizens in this land of our temporary exile.

May Jesus Christ be praised!