

Mar. 24, 2019

Thoughts from the pastor,

One of my Lenten penances this year has been to read more, especially books that aren't on my Kindle. I still read with my Kindle when I am walking around the 114<sup>th</sup> St. circle. I do reading while walking to stay awake. I am getting so much like my Dad, who fell asleep as soon as he sat down. If he was "on" he went full speed. When he was "off" he was sleeping. That is me now. So reading actual paper books has been hard because I am sitting down. I fall down if I try reading one of those while walking.

Currently I am reading The Faithful Departed: The Collapse of Boston's Catholic Culture, by Philip Lawler. I'm about half done. It is interesting. One of Lawler's points is how easy it is for clergy like myself to fudge on what the Church teaches. He points out actual situations in which it sure seems like priests, bishops, and even the pope seem to be doing that. I know that when I was first ordained, it was hard to hold to the Churches teaching on artificial birth control. I have had to confess in later years how I had caved to the idea that it really wasn't that bad and that people should just use their consciences. Part of that was that I wasn't feeling the backing of the Church behind this teaching. I never went so far as some clergy to fudge on the issue of abortion but even with that issue very little was done even though a lot was said.

A typical example would be how there was never any action from any other bishop other than Bishop Bruskewitz in Lincoln about the gravity of the sin of abortion. He excommunicated people. Everyone else seemed to be ready to brush it under the rug, and the secular press was always willing to label that Lincoln bishop as crazy. Catholic politicians could say how they were personally opposed to abortion but certainly did want to push this idea on the general public. That would be like me saying that I am personally opposed to rape but wouldn't want to have an actual law against it. The problem was that the babies were not as visible as victims as rape victims. Abortionists could tear babies apart and make the pieces disappear. That was harder with victims of rape, although even that is being done now. That meant that nothing was said about those very public figures coming right up for communion. Nothing was said about those who voted them into office. We would justify this by saying that they were voting for a person who wanted to help the poor, not a person who was pro-infanticide. I use the word infanticide rather than abortion here because the line between abortion and infanticide is being redrawn to include it in New York.

All that time, the official Church teaching condemned these sins of artificial birth control and abortion. Part of the dilemma had to do with how we could condemn the sin without condemning the sinner. God is merciful and forgives us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We don't have public tally boards on who has gone to confession and who hasn't. But it is in the area of public knowledge that we can see some differences. A woman can have an abortion and later regret her decision, seek forgiveness, and no one knows but her confessor. But when a public figure tells the world, over and over again, how he supports abortion; there doesn't seem to be any repentance. It is in this area in which it would seem that excommunication would seem to fit the best but there is little move by Church officials to make this move.

This is where the book makes an interesting observation. The Church promotes unity. We have a unity event coming up in our Archdiocese on June 8<sup>th</sup>. It is a good thing. The problem the

author points out is when that unity is a façade. There is no unified approach. That is why there is always so much parish shopping going on. A good part of that is to find a preacher that makes the shopper feel comfortable. The question is where is that comfort level? It is my experience that when a priest starts to preach straight Church teachings from the Catechism, he is labeled “rigid” and usually sent out to no man’s land. If he keeps everyone happy by staying away from the tough issues, he is labeled “pastoral” and is assigned to the big parishes. Often it works the same way with the appointment of bishops. There is never a hard and fast rule about these things but it sure seems to happen. So how are people going to be taught the true Catholic teachings?

There are two things to deal with in this area. First we are now in a culture that does not dialog. We don’t argue things out. We hear a viewpoint we don’t like and shut that person out forever or at least for the near future. In this way we don’t have to look at the actual issues. We just label people. Pro-abortion voters don’t ever have to deal with the things they are supporting and the consequences of those choices. The main consequence being that God is not happy about the killing of his children. This one of the official Church “non-negotiable” issues so there is no other side. When this has been recognized then the second issue of how to best help the poor can be dealt with. Poverty issues are hard to solve. Even Jesus said, “The poor you will have with you always.” Best practices in this area change all the time. The Church was historically the main force in this arena. Now we look to the government as the one to solve all poverty. Personally I think that is a crazy way of doing it, but that is an issue I am willing to discuss.

We are starting the whole cycle of another presidential election. Candidates are popping up everywhere. As individuals we are going to have to make a decision and vote again. I personally know that God exists and that I will personally be judged by him. That is a part of my “personal” relationship with him. After all, we are encouraged to have a personal relationship with God. When I see him for that judgment, I will not be judged on the fudged answers that I heard from different people as I went through life. I will be judged on the way I did or didn’t fudge on my own choices. I won’t be able to use excuses about how the bishops let me down, or my priest didn’t scare me into making the right decisions. I totally expect to hear things from God like, how come you believed that I loved you and didn’t believe that I also loved all those other children of mine that you never stood up for?

On a more positive note, we will have Rachel Kauffold here in two weeks to give us some information on FOCUS ministries. I will have more info on that next week. It will make donut Sunday more interesting.

This weekend, Tony LaMar will be here from the Archdiocesan Stewardship and Development Office with some helpful advice. He will be at all the Masses.

God bless you,  
Fr. Frank