



From A Bishop's Journal (567)

Choosing Hope

What we hear today about the world is very pessimistic. It seems as if our society is falling apart rather than growing and developing. What we hear are “apocalyptic” predictions of catastrophes still to come, as if the Book of Revelation [also known as the Book of the Apocalypse] were not the foremost book of hope amidst the most atrocious persecutions. This negative view of the world creates a morbid atmosphere which favours the deepest depressions.

Fighting Terrorism

Since September 11, 2001, war has been declared on Enemy Number One: “Terrorism.” Targets have been identified, strategies worked out, troops mobilised, astronomical budgets adopted, countries devastated, and fear established throughout the world. Since the “Axis of Evil” has been determined on the outside, the enemy must be flushed out, attacked, and destroyed. However, are these analyses and aims sufficiently accurate? Could the enemy also be in our own personal lives?

Enemies Within

Without having to identify them as Enemy Number One or Number Two, it is important to realise that in each one of us there are “powers” opposed to any kind of positive growth, peace, and progress. And there is no end to the ravages committed by these “powers”. Whole pages are filled with stories of the most sordid crimes imaginable, whether they are caused in the heat of out-of-control sexual passion, hatred, or jealousy. We used to call these “powers” mysterious, which implied deep dark secrets. They were called “capital sins” because they were at the root of all other sins. These “capital sins” were pride, avarice, envy, anger, impurity, gluttony, and laziness. However, since sin is a deliberate and willful personal act, we cannot lay at its feet the negative inclinations, tendencies, and orientations which are the common lot of all. When we know that so and so is often angry or jealous, we can then determine a specific approach to him or her, especially when that person wants to act on these inclinations.

Persistent Enemies

Without falling into destructive paranoia, we must admit that everyone can carry the seeds of anger, impurity, and excess in food and drink, and laziness can also lurk in the background. I knew a man

who was so jealous of his wife that he went so far as to mutilate the beautiful woman, so that others would not be attracted to her. I know a man who, when he has been drinking has fits of anger and breaks everything within his reach. I know a very sick man who could not endure his neighbours being in good health while he was sick. I know two young people so full of themselves who had no need of others because they considered themselves “brilliant,” the smartest of the class. And what about all these competitions of every kind, to make it into the Guinness Book of World Records? Besides, I don’t believe that it has ever been proven otherwise, that the fork kills more people than wars!

Acknowledged Weaknesses

It is important to be able to recognise our strengths and weaknesses. Saint Paul himself confessed that he did not always do the good he should have done; he felt helpless against what kept him from doing good. But once he became aware that he could receive the Risen Christ in his heart, he was able to cry out: “I willingly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9). The book of Psalms makes a similar statement: Psalm 129 states that with the Lord there is love and forgiveness. Holy Scripture reminds us over and over again that where sin abounds, grace superabounds.

Prayer for Peace

Whenever a war is declared people instinctively turn to God in prayer. I am deeply moved by such a gesture of faith. God alone can give us true and lasting Peace. I invite all my brothers and sisters to pray for peace, to pray in the secret of their hearts, as a family, a parish, a community. Here are examples of the boldness of our liturgical prayers:

“God of perfect peace, violence and cruelty can have no part with you. May those who are at peace with one another hold fast to the good will that unites them; may those who are enemies forget their hatred and be healed.”

“God our Father, maker and lover of peace, to know you is to live, and to serve you is to reign. All our faith is in your saving help; protect us from men of violence and keep us safe from weapons of hate.”

“God our Father, you reveal that those who work for peace will be called your sons and daughters. Help us to work without ceasing for that justice which brings true and lasting peace.”

“God of power and mercy, you destroy war and put down earthly pride. Banish violence from our midst and wipe away our tears that we may all deserve to be called your sons and daughters.”

Blessings

Far from being pessimistic regarding the future of our planet, the liturgy constantly invites us to take advantage of today to hasten the coming of God’s Kingdom: “Blessed are you for this world of

growth; may we bring it justice and peace. Blessed are you for the Church renewed by your Spirit: give her children happiness and hope. Blessed are you for the New Earth you have promised!" May this song of hope rise up in your hearts: "Finding you in my life, keeping the lamp burning bright, with you choosing trust, loving and knowing that one is loved."

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