

Faithful Citizenship

Two weeks ago, when the major television networks announced that voters had chosen a new president and vice-president elect, there seemed to be a National sigh of relief: that the nightmare of the past four years was almost over, and, perhaps, we could get back to “normal.” But, each passing day since then – there’s been a steady – stark – reminder that we are a dangerously polarized Nation, that is struggling whether to choose what Abraham Lincoln called our “better angels” or continue to fire-up our lower angels, our demons, our original racist sins that have capacity to destroy not only our institutions of Democracy as we know it, but our very Nation itself.

I must be honest: it is so frightening to me – that after these four years in which the Trump Administration has presided over some of the most horrific and scandalous policies in modern American history: Muslim travel ban; separation of children at our southern border; constant fomenting of anti-immigrant; anti-black racism, the devastating failure to contain the coronavirus pandemic. And yet: 72 million Americans – and, according to the New York Times, 62% of Catholics – voted for four more years of this direction!

Complicating things on the national level is the influence of social media and Talk Radio that create an alternative “reality” ... the whole purpose of which is – not to enlighten – but to demonize.

Roger Ailes, created a “news” network, Fox News, that – if you watch it – would lead one to think that:

- American cities this summer were all on fire with racial riots;
- Covid-19 is virtually cured;
- President Trump has done more for racial minorities than any president since Abraham Lincoln;
- President Trump won the election – which was stolen from him!

All fantasies – not in any way based on reality!!

Anyone who genuinely cares about the future of this Country needs to think hard about this chilling reality. Anyone would be short-sighted to conclude that the Trump Administration is the cause of the National soul-sickness. The truth is that what we have experienced these four years as more of a symptom of a cancer that began decades ago.

Back in 1959, John Steinbeck, the author, sent a letter to Adlai Stevenson in which he wrote:

“If I wanted to destroy a nation, I would give it too much, I would have it on its knees: miserable, greedy and sick.”

He was commenting on the consumeristic, winner-take-all attitudes of his day. How much more have these attitudes been metastasized since 1959?!

Sisters and brothers, I’m sure that many would question why such things would be shared in a Sunday Homily? But, if we are to be true to our commitment as followers of Jesus and his mission – we must read the signs of the times through the lens – the values – of the Gospel. This weekend: The Feast of Christ the King is the last weekend of our Liturgical Year. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus is handing out a final report card. What’s the criterion of the Final Report Card, the Final Judgment?

Jesus didn't ask: "Have you been impatient with others?"
 "Did you go to Mass on Sunday?"
 "Did you have impure thoughts?"
 "Did you say your morning and evening prayers?"

No — the ultimate criteria was: "Did you feed the hungry?"
 "Did you clothe the naked?"
 "Did you welcome the stranger?"

Jesus didn't tell this parable to scare us, but rather to teach us that to know him is to be in relationship with his beloved poor. When we fall in love with Christ in the poor – we will inevitably want to serve Jesus in and with the poor.

Sisters and brothers, this may be the key for us to move forward from our National dilemma.

Pope Francis, expands on this thought in his latest Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. The Pope asks: "What does our world, our nation – what does our city – what does our church – need to do to save us from ourselves?"

What he says we need to save us is *not* a major source of energy or fresh food supply – as critical as they are, *not* a cure for cancer – as wonderful as that would be.

What the world needs FIRST, is the realization that every member of the human race is a sister or brother to every other member – NO MATTER how distant – different or unfamiliar.

The Pope writes:

“No one can face life in isolation... Let us dream, then as a single human family, fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home; each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her voice — sisters and brothers all.”

And so, sisters and brothers – as Catholics, as members of our All Saints Parish – once again, we have a decision to make: we can submit to cynicism and despair – curl up on our couches and ignore what is happening to our National values, to our political system, to our people – our sisters and brothers, to our Nation. We can simply surrender to it all, roll over, give in... OR: we can choose once again to follow Jesus the prophet. The 'prophet' is the person who says "No" to *everything that is not of God*: "No" to the abuse of women; "No" to the rejection of the stranger; "No" to crimes against immigrants and children; "No" to the rape of our trees and pollution of our skies and poisoning of our oceans. "No" to the despicable devastation of humankind for more wealth, more power, more control for a few.

How do we get started?

I would conclude by sharing that we have a wonderful example in Syracuse where a local organization's Board of Directors has had the courage to admit its White supremacy and systemic racism – even at the cost of losing long time influential Board Members and wealthy donors.

As reported in last Sunday's Post-Standard: Vera House, a highly respected not-for-profit that has been helping victim of domestic violence (founded by the late Sister Mary Vera, a Sister of St. Joseph) – in their new Strategic Plan – state: “Vera House commits to dismantle its white supremacist and racist foundations and systems of organization to enable Board, Foundation, Staff, Interns, Volunteers and victims/survivors full engagement.”

WOW! Now *that's* a prophetic Organization, that is taking a step in ultimately moving us all forward. Supporting counter-cultural values comes at a cost... social, political and economic... which is why I propose to our Community that we make an \$1,000 donation to Vera House from our Outreach Fund... which, while clearly not supplying all that they need ... will support their Mission and our common values.

Sisters and brothers, next weekend – Thanksgiving Weekend – we begin our Advent Season in preparation for Christmas. Let this Advent be a time of hope: a new beginning for our Nation and for our hearts; and let us dare to dream with the prophets who envision lions lying down with lambs and nations beating swords into plowshares. Let us begin!

Amen!