

...“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (*Mt 16:13*) this is a challenge, a call to us throughout the ages, a question that we all have to answer in our own hearts. Who is the Son of Man, who is this Jesus of Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, a carpenter himself who was so poor at his birth that he was born in a stable? Once we answer that question, the next questions are more difficult; “What does the Son of Man mean to me?” What level of involvement does he have in my life? Is it just Sunday morning, check the box, or should there be something more?

Today’s Gospel continues to demand answers. “...you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” (*Mt 16:18*) What is the Church? Who is the Church? What are the limits of the Church’s authority? How can we trust the Church? After all, it is run by humans, sinners like us, broken like us, subject to scandal and shame, just like us.

This Gospel doesn’t leave us without answers. “...You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (*Mt 16:16*) The Son of God says to Simon, now Peter; “...I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (*Mt 16:19*) Peter and through him the Church has authority over eternal life and death in heaven and on earth. Eternal life comes through the love of God generously poured out for the forgiveness of our sins and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And death, well that becomes our choice through our decision to accept or reject the great gift of Reconciliation.

Another question, does all sin take place within the walls of the Church? It seems like a silly question, but it resonates with the question of authority. If Church through the Priests can offer the forgiveness of sins that take place outside the walls of the Church, does it not also follow that the Church has authority outside these walls? You can’t give what you don’t have, so you can’t forgive a sin if you don’t have authority over the person, time and place where the sin took place.

Of course the Church has authority in the World (*Gaudium et spes*), and it is most clearly stated in the Great Commission; “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” (*Mt 28:19-20*)

Why have I gone through the Gospel this way? Because the Church is in the world and of the world. Our Catholic faith isn’t only a religion, it is a culture.

Look at our feasts, the way the children dress for their First Holy Communion, the icons that fill our homes, the innumerable daily devotions and prayer groups. Our faith permeates our lives, forms our decisions and guides us to our ultimate goal, eternal life with Jesus and Mary in heaven.

In the past I've heard the criticism that politics has no place in church. The answer to that sounds like something a politician would say, yes and no. Let's start by defining politics for this discussion. Politics is the way that people come together to form a consensus. It should be for the good order and betterment of society to help us toward our ultimate goal, but unfortunately it usually falls short. There is politics in the office, in the family, in government and dare I say it, even in the Church. It is a normal part of life and as so in and of itself is not evil.

Where is the Church's authority in the political arena? Certainly not in the specific endorsement of a political party or candidate. Pope Saint Pius X made the separation of Church and State abundantly clear through word and action while he was Pope. The authority of the Church in politics, business, military actions, education and every other human endeavor is in faith and morals. Let me say this again, the Church's authority in every human endeavor is in faith and morals.

Because of this, when secular actions lead people into sin, particularly those actions that are destructive to the dignity of the person as a child of God, then it is the responsibility of the Church to speak out against those offenses. It can be the use of weapons of mass destruction against civilian populations, rampant unbridled capitalism that enslaves people for their labor, or political evils that are destructive to the dignity of man. Our responsibility to speak up and try to get people to correct these evils is given to each and every one of us throughout Scripture (*Mt: 18:15-18; 1Cor, 5; Gal 6: 1-2; etc.*) and is considered a Spiritual Work of Mercy.

Over the last month, Fr. Edisson and Fr. Mike have both spoken to the evils of socialism and Marxism or as it is better known communism. This has tweaked some sensibilities so I thought that I would take a few moments and explain why these political systems are viewed as evil by the Church.

Pope Saint John Paul II was probably the most prolific, but every Pope since Pius IX in 1846 up to Benedict the XVI has spoken out specifically against the evils of socialism. What about Pope Francis, is he a Socialist? No. He is a liberal, he is concerned about the environment, and he does have a radical preference for the poor and disenfranchised. But he doesn't see these issues as government mandates to control people and the economy. He sees them as

our personal responsibility to correct. For example, it is our personal responsibility to take care of the poor. Taking care of the poor through government confiscation wages robs us of the grace that comes from our voluntary gift to help the poor.

Why are socialism and communism considered intrinsically evil? It goes back to the First Commandment; "I am the Lord your God, you shall not have other gods before me." (*Ex 20: 2-3; Dt 5:7*) Both systems attempt to replace God with the state. Both systems violate the First Commandment. Communism by the destruction of the family, outlawing the church and making practicing religion a crime.

Where communism is a bull in the china shop, socialism is subtle while they both share the same goals. Socialism starts by postulating that morality is a matter entirely in the jurisdiction of mankind; that it rests on and can be determined by popular vote instead of being subject to the law of God. We see this in our own country with the legal murder of the most vulnerable among us, young and old is touted as a 'right' and deemed to be a morally correct by popular vote and the actions of the courts. In deciding who gets to live and who must die the state attempts to become like unto God.

Socialism, like communism is evil in many other ways, I've just cited these examples to make the case for the Church in the time we have today.

Now I'm sure that I may have offended someone by this homily. However I'd like all of you to think about this. What would happen if every Catholic in the world actually went out and lived their faith? What would that mean for the family? What would that mean in business? How would that change the course of government? How would that change the world?

References:

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