

Homily for October 19 – 20th 2019

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

“Faith-filled Citizens”

What are some of the first words children instinctively say: “It’s mine” and “That’s not fair!”. There is an innate sense we have as humans that I need to look out for me because well, the “world is not fair”.

There is a strong connection between these two words. Because we are all prone to be self-preoccupied because of original sin we can say that’s mine, and this is mine – on it goes. But this can lead us to conclude that in a world like this we experience injustice – where what we may think is rightly due to me is not forthcoming.

Consider how this can play out in the home, where parents favour one child over another, by privileges extended to one and not the other. Think of how this plays out in our politics where one part of the country feels neglected because those in power are courting another part of the country to the detriment of the area where the neglected citizens live. Think of the experience within First Nations Communities where the way to articulate and interrelationship that is respectful and equitable, allowing for a greater say in how these communities govern their lives can be so elusive.

There is within Catholic Social teaching an understanding of the relationship between rightfully respecting what is mine while at the same time ensuring justice for the larger society of which the smaller groups, and or, individuals belong. The two words that define this are “subsidiarity” and “solidarity”.

Subsidiarity helps to ensure personal rights while solidarity looks to what is good for the society as a whole.

What is the principle of subsidiarity? It states that a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order by depriving the latter of its functions. Rather the higher order should support it in case of need and help to co- ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good."

What then is the principle of solidarity? Pope St John Paul II in his encyclical on Social Concern said that solidarity is the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all".¹

Let me illustrate two ways this is to plays out in our public life. In Alberta the government is to ensure there are standards of education that are required in all of our schools. This is the principle of solidarity. There are curriculum requirements that all students are to fulfill, and the

¹ <https://ccgaction.org/SpiritualLife/BenedictOnTrinitySubsidiaritySolidarity>

common good requires these criteria be in place. However, the principle of subsidiarity is also affirmed, where the community of higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of lower order. Therefore, the government funds education but allows parents to choose the kind of school their children will attend. Three types of schools illustrate this. Public, Catholic and Home-Schooling Associations.

The second example I give is obstetrics. In Alberta woman can choose to give birth to her child in the hospital or at home. In both cases the government pays for the service, the principle of solidarity – while at the same time respecting the choice of the parents to choose where they want to give birth, the principle of subsidiarity.

I have brought these words – subsidiarity and solidarity forward today because they are important principles for us to consider with tomorrow's federal election. One of the things we want to consider when casting our ballot is which leader and party will most fully respect the interplay between subsidiarity and solidarity.

Let me say one more thing about this. The Principle of Solidarity requires and governments to insure we are growing in being better stewards of the environment and so need to work towards green house reduction. However, this cannot be at the expense of the level of subsidiarity, that if ignored so penalizes those in the energy sector that their opportunity to be employed and work towards more green solutions is jeopardized.

I can't say more about this now, but I think keeping both principles before us can allow for reasoned and respected conversations about how to most responsibly address issues of climate change – especially here in Alberta where we are concerned for the environment and the energy sector.

As Catholics we realize our responsibility to be good citizens and are therefore invested in caring for the social fabric of our country, province and city. However, we also have the perspective that is able to articulate that what is even more fundamental to our daily lives is the gift of faith. Jesus in today's Gospel speaks honestly about those in positions of power who do not respect the interrelationship between solidarity and subsidiarity. The judge of the parable had no regard for justice of the widow or the common good. But the widow was persistent in her pursuit of justice. Let me highlight one aspect of her perseverance. Remember the judge said:

Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'

Although our version speaks of the judge responding to her because she may wear him out, this is not a very good translation from the Greek. The New American Standard translation is closer to the Greek original. It has the judge say:

because this widow keeps bothering me, I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.'"

The literal Greek is the word hypopiazō. It's a boxing term. Paul actually uses this elsewhere when he talks about boxing the air or shadowboxing, this imagery of punching. So the most

literal translation would be: “lest she come and give me a black eye.” She’s not the persistent widow, she’s the violent widow, and perhaps you’ve known some old ladies like this, who you don’t...you don’t want to mess with them. That’s the kind of woman that’s being described here. Basically, this judge is afraid that if he doesn’t give this woman a verdict, she’s going to come and do physical violence against him. She’s going to give him a black eye.²

The point of the text is to help us understand something fundamental to our spiritual lives. In this world where we sometimes experience that life isn’t fair, we will never apply this to God. Rather we are to be people, like the widow, who is confident to persevere for the right even in the face of great wrong. It is this that has inspired Catholics to be motivated by their faith to be actively engaged in creating more just societies in the countries where we live.

On this eve of the election may we exercise the privilege, responsibility and right to vote. However, regardless of the results may we affirm that what is most important in our daily lives is the gift of faith whereby we trust in Jesus’ teaching as passed onto to us through his Church. A theme Paul affirms in today’s Epistle where he talks about the gift and authority of the Bible. When we have a Catholic worldview, this allows us to see our national political life within this much larger perspective. In a world that is at times not fair we have one of whom we confidently say:

My helps comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

We give thanks for the gift that allows us to live in a country where we can choose a government based on our informed decision while at the same time free to assemble in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is for this reason that we are called to be faith-filled citizens on Election Day and every day.

² https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/1202/2816/files/29th_Sunday_of_OT_Year_C_Transcript.pdf?9829