



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

3 August 2021

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

On February 5, 1994, Mother Theresa of Calcutta was the main speaker for the National Prayer Breakfast held in Washington, D.C. This saintly icon of justice, peace, and care for the poor and abandoned delivered a message that focused on our responsibility to love God and our neighbor. As I read her message, her words stir me at the core of my being:

“It is not enough for us to say: “I love God,” but I also have to love my neighbor. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live?

We are talking of love of the child, which is where love and peace must begin. These are the things that break peace.

.... I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child... By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems. And, by abortion, that father is told that he does not have to take any responsibility at all for the child he has brought into the world.... Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.”

Sadly, this week in the same place where Mother Theresa gave this motivating message about love of God and love of neighbors, especially the unborn, we heard some extremely disappointing news from our elected political leaders in the US House of Representatives. They voted to remove longstanding, bipartisan taxpayer and conscience protections including the Hyde Amendment. The House vote to make taxpayers pay for abortions is both an assault on the dignity of life and contrary to the wishes of most Americans.

The impetus to write comes from my prayer and reflection following the June USCCB meeting and current political climate. At this meeting, and in many pronouncements over the past seven months by Archbishop Naumann, Chair of the Pro-Life Committee, has brought to our attention various attacks on the sacredness of human life.

I by no means have ever seen myself as a scholarly theologian but rather a parish priest who hopefully has laid down his life in sacrifice to listen to and follow Christ the Good Shepherd. It is his voice that cries out to me as continual legislation comes forth from our current elected political leaders that is diametrically opposed to the foundational tenets of our Catholic faith, that call us to safeguard the sacredness and dignity of all human life from conception to natural death.

My spiritual reflection flows from a particular focus on the role of St. Joseph noted by our Holy Father in *Patris Corde*. In one of his roles, St. Joseph is identified as a “Courageous and Creative Father.” In

this role, he is referred to as “Guardian of the Holy Family or Protector of the Incarnation.”

St. Joseph began as Protector of the Incarnation when he wanted to quietly divorce Mary who had become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. An angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed him to take Mary as his wife. He knew exactly what that meant in Jewish culture. He was to be a husband to her and an earthly father to the child whom the angel said would save his people from their sins. He would provide for them and protect them.

Shortly after the child was born, an angel appeared to Joseph and instructed him to take Mary and the child to Egypt to escape the evil wrath of Herod. Herod, heard about the birth of a newborn king, and saw him as a threat to his egotistical power. He sent his soldiers throughout the region to slaughter every male child under the age of two. In honor of these massacred children, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Innocents on 28 December.

When it was time for them to return from Egypt, the angel instructed Joseph, the Protector of the Incarnation, to return to the region where they settled in Nazareth. This fulfilled the words of the prophet, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

As St. Joseph was called directly by God to protect, and provide a healthy, holy and loving environment for this child, so we are called to be protectors of this divine blueprint that lives in every person. By the command of an angel, St. Joseph without hesitation responded as a Protector of the Incarnation and took Mary and the baby Jesus to safety to flee the wrath of the wicked Herod.

The threat of Herod, to destroy the Incarnation of God, continues to exist today. It is ultimately perpetrated by the Evil One who has complete hatred for all of humanity from conception to natural death. Archbishop Gomez in his address to the General Assembly recalled the words of Pope Francis in 2016, “we are living in a moment of annihilation of man as image of God.”

The threat of Herod that we face today comes in the form of government systems and leaders throughout the world, and sadly in our own nation, who advance the killing of the unborn. Sadly, our nation has recently approved millions of dollars to spread this slaughter throughout the world, along with the proliferation of contraception. Yes, this is a slaughter of the innocents. Yes, this is the desecration of the divine blueprint, the stamp of the Incarnation of Christ living and dwelling in every person. Yes, this destruction of the divine image is not limited to the unborn.

Our Catholic faith teaches us that every soul pro-created by the sacred hands of God is given a guardian angel. This beautiful relationship of angelic and incarnate creatures is perfected in the Incarnation of God himself. Joseph responded without hesitation to the message of one single angel on multiple occasions. There are over 62 million angels crying out from Heaven to us to similarly respond as Joseph, to be Protectors of the Incarnation. Joseph did not enter into dialogue with the angel, he simply did as the angel told him.

The first reading for Mass for the 16th Sunday was from the Prophet Jeremiah, “Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord.” I must personally admit that this rattles my heart, mind and soul. As a bishop, Successor of the Apostles, I am called to shepherd the faithful of the Diocese of Fairbanks. I must seriously ponder my culpability for not responding “full throated” as a prophet, a Protector of the Incarnation. St. Catherine of Siena boldly reminds us: “We’ve had enough exhortations to be silent. Cry out with a thousand tongues – I see the world is rotten because of silence.” The words of St. Catherine and the Prophet Jeremiah stir me to the core of my being.

This is a cry from Heaven to respond in our baptismal calling as priest, prophet and king to be Protector's of the Incarnation. Like the priests commanded by Joshua to blow the horns in unison with the shouts of the faithful of God (Joshua 6), we must believe in the commands of the Lord to sound the trumpet. We have to believe that countless angels and saints of Heaven join us in a triumphal voice, and that this voice of truth will crumble the walls of any political leader or institution that advances the desecration of the beauty, goodness and truth of the divine blueprint of life.

God gives us the very gift of the Incarnation of Himself as a source of strength, the Holy Eucharist. The Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer for Corpus Christi Sunday reminds us that the Eucharist is a "perfect gift of praise and the single bond of charity" that unites the entire human family. Our Amen, our "Yes", to our encounter with the Incarnate Christ in the reception of Holy Communion is a public and loud proclamation to be a Protector of the Incarnation in unison with the action of St. Joseph. In the words of our Lord himself, "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one" (Mt 5:37). May we pray more fervently, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

As the angel announced the birth of the Incarnation of God, "I bring to you good news", may we, Protectors of the Incarnation, embrace with countless angels the same command at the conclusion of the celebration of the Sacrifice of Mass, "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."

Fraternally in Christ,



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