

Living the Spirit The Political and the Spiritual

There are many themes or subjects in my personal conversations (real or imaginary) with you or with those who read my writings. My goal every time I write these inserts is to make a conversation out of my thoughts and share it with you. Lately I have been almost forced to have a great many thoughts about political subjects. Like a good priest I respect the decision of our Church leaders that its priests should not engage in active politics – like running for civil offices. Yet, what is happening now brings me to speak on religious themes at times that the secular world has decided to engage in and even make its own. In fact many themes simply cannot be said to be devoid of a political aspect. But be warned: I take no interest in being partisan in my writings.

I have seen a political theme in some of the Church's relationship with the world at large. Certainly the visit of Pope Francis made this kind of relationship between the spiritual and the religious obvious. When he speaks of God's creative power and gift to humanity and brings it into the practical suggestion that we take care of God's gift, he speaks a real theology. It is not his fault that some see only the current arguments about such things as global warming etc. One must note that critics of his letter "*Laudate Si*" seem to have missed all he says about how the world throws away new life in the unborn etc.

I watched his visit almost entirely. I applaud his speaking to our Congress. It is time that a Church representative speaks out about many things. He was forceful in reminding our representatives that their work is to be a work of service to humanity and to the nation, and most of all to people rather than to an ideology. His words were careful and perhaps that is why so many failed to get the underlying message which was not political at all but spiritual.

In the circumstance in which we find our nation these days, let me simply share with you a political message. It comes to me from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. I have been a member for as long as I can tell. Here is what the message says:

"Religious liberty is on everyone's mind these days. ...it is open season on Christians. Sadly, this is doubly true of Catholics – we are the one's getting hammered the most." [This is why the League will send three Open Letters "that address the current crisis in religious liberty." Here is why.

"At the **Executive level**, the draconian effects of the Obama administration's Health and Human Services mandate are stripping Catholic organizations of their rights, and forcing them to participate in the culture of death.

At the **Legislative level**, the passivity of the U.S. Congress to pass laws protecting religious liberty is leaving Catholic organizations open to criminal action and revocation of tax-exempt status.

And at the **Judicial level**, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision legalizing gay marriage has unleashed a wave of anti-Catholic backlash and the criminalization of Biblical teaching."

As a priest I knew used to say, ending his homily: "Think about it."

Spirituality – Part 2

Not long ago I wrote about spirituality. I have noticed that there seems to be a great deal of interest these days in “spirituality.” Of course, the meaning of the word may be quite varied. I see how the AARP bulletin has Oprah on its cover with the word spirituality in print, meaning finding the search for meaning. While on the subject, let me remind you of a good program offered to you at Our Lady is on this very subject. Yes, in its proper meaning. I encourage your interest.

I admit that my theological studies did not separate the subject of spirituality from other areas of theological study. Ascetical theology was to be known more by practice than by academic learning in my Seminary days. So I admit to having a more personal than academic view to just what spirituality means. For me having a “spirituality” means living the Spirit. Spirituality cannot be divorced for the faithful Catholic from the work of the Holy Spirit. He is after all the Teacher of all Truth, and the Advocate and guide for all of us. I understand spirituality as being an integral part of living. It is not just an ideology that people write about, talk about, or search for. It encompasses the paths of life which we take on our journey from God to God. It is a part of the human soul; it is life, and its center must be God.

Spirituality for Catholics is often defined, or at least described by the adjectives placed before it. Early in the Church there was a desire to escape the world’s power over the souls of its members. So was born Monastic spirituality. It grew from the wisdom of the Desert Fathers to St. Benedict and many others. Soon enough new forms of spirituality were found in the Church. These are often related to Saints like Francis, Dominic, Theresa of Avila and so on. Often new forms incorporated much of what was found in other forms. It is proper to say that most of us have a spirituality that is rich with many insights from them all.

Spirituality for us means living to become holy, to be the kind of images of God that He meant us to be. I see it as having started for me with the simple task in life to keep the Commandments and so to love God and others. That is surely what Jesus taught. But there is more than just obeying commandments. There is a way of life that certainly looks to the good of others. There is a sharing of the good news and there are elements of sacrifice for the poor and hungry, the lonely and suffering. We cannot but look to the example of the saints for how to practice virtue.

There is for me no understanding of Catholic spirituality that can be divorced from having Jesus as its center. In a special way we cannot overlook the Eucharistic presence of Jesus. While the Church allows us to choose our way of spirituality, provided it is an approved way, we are free to walk our own special path to holiness. In our choosing the Spirit is at work. We are called to let Him guide us by His gifts and give us the fruits of His Presence in our lives. Let us pray for one another that we always remain open to them all. And remember, God is Love!

God love and bless you always!

Monsignor Morrison