

BULLETIN -- APRIL 17

Learning from nature. Last Monday morning, I had the opportunity to observe two objects gliding together in perfect symmetry along the Atlantic shore. Melbourne is near an air base, and the international airport is just a couple miles away from the downtown area, so at first I assumed from the shape and maneuvering that it was a pair of military aircraft doing some training. I was just thinking, “Wow, they’re *good!*” when they made a slight dip and turn together. Then I could see from the crook of their necks that they were pelicans, out for the morning hunt for breakfast fish. What a lesson to be learned from nature: working together in harmony can produce great results for all parties. One bird was obviously in the lead; but their flight was so synchronized that who was leading and who was bringing up the rear was clearly a non-issue as they focused together on the task at hand.

We humans tend to get so wrapped up in *who’s* doing what that we forget about the *what*. “Who does the boss think he is?” “Who are *you* to tell *me* . . .?” We are not exempt from such behavior in the Church. “Where does the Bishop get off telling *us* how our money should be spent?” Etc., etc. Christ gave us a way to spare us from a lot of this grief in the way the Spirit has structured the Church. The Bishop’s role of administration is really a GIFT to the Church, so that the rest of us don’t have to get stressed out about the direction the Church is going. “That’s not fair!” some will clamor. “We should have a voice! The Church should be a democracy!” But that’s neither found in nor founded on Scripture, which records the mission given to the Church as, “Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” One would hope that those encouraging more participation in Church governance are not thinking of the antics of either major American political party as a model! Humanly speaking, the Church has stumbled and bumbled its way through 2,000 years of history now, frequently with far less competence and good will than one can often find in the ranks of both laity and clergy today. Except in glaring cases of criminal activity, doctrinal failure, or moral laxity, we at the very least do not do WRONG in obeying and carrying out the program of activities proposed to us by our Bishop. And that should be a great relief to all of us, at CSA time and throughout the year! Let your CSA gift or pledge be a genuine act of religion, of faith, of praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, “who put all things in subjection under Christ’s feet, and gave him as head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Mercy, mercy! The spiritual works of mercy are:

- 1) admonishing the sinner,
- 2) instructing the ignorant,
- 3) counseling the doubtful,
- 4) comforting the sorrowful,
- 5) bearing wrongs patiently,
- 6) forgiving all injuries, and
- 7) praying for the living and the dead.

My, there’s certainly no lack of opportunity to be an instrument of God’s mercy in such situations. But there are lots of misconceptions about how to go about it. “Admonish”

does not mean “berate” or “shun.” There are times when our absence can serve as a warning about the sinful nature of something going on. Ever get invited to a bachelor party at a strip club? Ever ask the prospective groom, “Is that *really* the way you want to prepare yourself for something as holy and important as marriage?” Ever suggest to one of the other groomsmen who chided you for not showing up that you figured your absence from such an affair was a better gift for both bride and groom than anything else you could give them? See? You don’t have to wave a Bible over your head or condemn everyone to hell. Consider the gentle admonition a work of mercy. You could well be sowing the seeds of a more profound way of looking at life. There are ‘way too many of us who are so-called “good church people” until we have a chance to be out with the boys. Or the girls. Or the crowd from work. What kind of witnesses are we THEN?

And then when it comes to bearing wrongs patiently and forgiving all injuries, hey, this is not an invite to win an Academy Award as a drama queen or king. “Oh, they’ve all turned against me, but I’ll just suffer through it!” (Back of the hand to the forehead, pained expression on face.) Great acting, falls far short of a genuine work of mercy. If you’re more interested in drawing attention to yourself, you’re not applying the medicine of mercy to the one who needs it. A cheerful greeting or welcome to someone who has offended you is not only good manners, it takes a big step toward setting things right. Note that I’m not talking about an abused wife tearing up the personal protection order and welcoming her husband home to continue his felonious ways. God does not expect us to abandon common sense in order to participate in his mercy. But we should be looking for some way to get God’s message across, even if it’s refusing to prosecute beyond what’s necessary to accomplish safety and security for all involved.

And the bronze medal for English proficiency goes to . . . Or maybe it was a medal for a beer consumption contest, in which the second runner-up came in --



THIRST? We can bet that the medal was probably made in China, like everything else, and when you have a whole culture that writes in pictures, translating thoughts into alphabets can be challenging, just like reading Chinese characters is for us. Far more challenging is dealing with all the coats and clothes that come from China with zippers. I have yet to find a piece of Chinese-made clothing on which the zipper works, consistently and effortlessly. The material gets caught,

the zipper below unzips just as fast as you zip it upwards, you can’t get it back down, the parts won’t fit properly into each other, and it’s like trying to zip and unzip something made out of papier-mâché. Perhaps the medal in the picture was awarded to someone who entered a contest to design a new and improved zipper, but only came in 3st. Maybe his brother designed the medal. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “A decline in courage may be the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the West in our days. The Western world has lost its civil courage both as a whole and separately, in each country, each government, each

political party, and, of course, in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of a loss of courage by the entire society. Of course, there are many courageous individuals, but they have no determining influence on public life” (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Harvard commencement address, June 8, 1978).