

BULLETIN -- APRIL 24

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, our Catholic Services Appeal gives each of us an excellent opportunity to put our words about mercy and charity into action. The Church at the diocesan level makes a huge impact on the needs of people in West Michigan that no individual parish is equipped to address alone. We join our fellow Catholics from Marion to Lake Odessa, from Byron Center to Free Soil, and everywhere in between, in giving witness to Christ in this powerful way. Won't you join us in praising and thanking God through your gift or pledge? You've received letters of appeal and information from the Bishop and from the pastor. If you haven't, contact the parish office and we'll be glad to fill you in. We aren't big on going through all the motions of fund-raising. We trust that you know what needs to be done, and that you have the good will to do it. If you're a new wage-earner and unclear on how much might be expected, we offer the 1% guideline as a helpful one. One percent of your net annual income is a reasonable amount to pledge or give to CSA. With another 4% to your parish and another 5% to various other charities you select, that totals up to 10%, which is the tithe observed by God's people in the Scriptures as well as that recommended by Dave Ramsey in learning how to budget your money. Whether you can do more, or cannot do as much, your sacrifice is equally important to the Church *and* to you.

Our area fire fighters and friends will join us for Mass and breakfast next Sunday as we honor St. Florian, their patron. Last week a fire company responded to a house in Prince Georges County, MD, just outside Washington, DC, on a call for medical assistance. As they entered the home, one of the fire fighters was shot and killed and another critically injured. Fire, police, or EMT, our first responders still make house calls, even in all the places that most people avoid if they can. They never know when an incident is a set-up, or when a mentally unstable person is going to react violently. Our annual Mass is an opportunity to let them know that we offer grateful prayers for them daily, not just once a year.

More than a nod to socialism. One current candidate for high public office is a committed socialist. (There have been others, and they've even been elected, but have generally eschewed the label and not disclosed their entire agenda.) Socialists like to remind Christians that a type of socialism is lauded in the Scriptures, especially in the Acts of the Apostles, the story of the early Church. Look, for instance, at Acts 4:32 and 34, where we read: "The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. . . There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need." This idyllic picture has inspired many Christians over the centuries to enter the religious life, many others to acts of magnificent generosity. It has also been used to scold Christians who understandably balk at the thought of having such communitarian behavior imposed for reasons other than living out the Gospel of Christ.

Socialism of any kind is especially dangerous when it becomes involuntary, imposed on the body politic by an elite group under a fair-sounding phrase like

“redistribution of wealth.” When property is seized under the guise of government programs for redistributive justice, both the means and the incentive to continue to provide wealth from the property are often removed. This is, proverbially, killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Socialists get so upset at the thought of some people having more and other people having less that they quickly become frantic in their efforts to reduce everyone to an equality that will never truly exist. As human beings, we differ in talent, ability, ambition, inheritance, genetics, interests, and a host of other qualities.

Socialist societies have demonstrated over and over that simply taking wealth from one group and giving it away to another impoverishes *everyone*, killing not only the drive to succeed and achieve, but also killing the sense of human dignity and worth gained from accomplishment. When communism collapsed under its own weight in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union 25 years ago, what all entrepreneurs trying to start or revive businesses in those lands found was that people had to be trained to work, to produce, to serve with a smile. The customer had been lost for so long under a centralized economy that hardly anyone had a memory of the commercial behaviors that we simply take for granted.

Some of our gentle college students who have been raised in sheltered, non-competitive atmospheres where everything is fair and everyone is right and no one is wrong are easy pickin’s for the socialists on campus. They’ll direct the Christians to the Acts of the Apostles and convince them to vote for someone who will pretend to be the very embodiment of the Scriptures, even if the individual doesn’t happen to believe in God. And since according to their doctrine, non-belief is as good as belief and atheism is just as good as religion and things like gender, marriage, and family are really unfair and outmoded concepts . . . Well, you can see where so much of this is leading. “Occupy Wall Street” is not so much a slogan or an organization as it is a state of mind, and often a state of drug-induced, lifelong lethargy. And that smoky haze in the gathering of the like-minded makes it ever so much easier for those who proclaim fairness for all to lead the gullible into a captivity where all are satisfied as long as they remain anesthetized.

Spring and summer safety. I was reminded down in Florida that the Sunshine State has the most motorcycle fatalities in the nation. AAA says that almost 20% of vehicle fatalities in Florida involve a motorcycle, while motorcyclists make up only about 7% of licensed motorists. Since the repeal of the helmet law in Florida, motorcycle fatalities there have more than doubled.

It really bothers me to see how casually vulnerable so many motorcyclists have chosen to be since the repeal of our helmet law in Michigan. But it has served to heighten my awareness of cyclists, particularly since our neighborhood around the church is host to several popular biker bars. I thank God for each one I see who has the sense to voluntarily wear a helmet and obey speed and other traffic laws. And I strive to be a conscientious Christian driver myself, looking that extra time for a biker who might not have a headlight on, or who might be buzzing along, hidden in a traffic lane behind legally parked cars. I just wish more of them would be more considerate of us who can’t always *see* them until it’s almost too late, and wear the gear that could protect both of our lives. Because in any injury accident, no matter who’s “at fault,” it’s not always the one with the *physical* injuries whose life is changed the most. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: Whoever said Maine is the only state whose name is just one syllable obviously never spent any time in Nyawk.