

BULLETIN -- AUGUST 13

Last week we heard a little from a young man who had rejected Catholicism, Christianity, religion, and any idea of God, a Creator, or a Higher Power. Hope he never has to go to A.A., it's a lot tougher submitting to "fate"! This week we hear briefly from a middle-aged man who called in from an outlying area to ask about someone's baptism record. It wasn't the baptism he was interested in, it was the date of birth. We had it, it was over a hundred years old, and I provided the date to the caller. He couldn't just thank me, hang up, and go about his business. He was talking to a priest, apparently for the first time in a long time, and good ol' Catholic guilt (perhaps along with the Holy Spirit) must have prompted him to blurt out, "You know, I was raised Catholic."

Priest: "Oh, yeah? I hear that a lot. I was, too."

Friend: "Uh, yeah, but I don't go anymore." Ooohh, confession time.

Priest: "Gee, I do. What happened to *you*?"

Friend: "Oh, I dunno. Just got away from it. Church is just the same old thing all the time."

Priest: "Yeah, just like eating. Plate to mouth, plate to mouth, what a bore."

Friend: "Haha, well, you know what I mean. . ."

Priest: "I'm afraid I don't. If I love someone, I'm gonna hang in there with them even if it's tough. Do you love Jesus? Are you grateful for all he's done for you?"

Friend: "Well, now you're gettin' kinda personal. . ."

Priest: "Hey, you're the one that brought it all up. Do you love Jesus?"

Friend: "Well, yeah, sure, I mean I haven't lost my *faith* or nothin' . . ."

Priest: "Even though you aren't really *doing* anything about it."

Friend: "Well, I don't have to go to church to be a Christian."

Priest: "*Christian* is a follower of Christ, and Christ says you are part of a *people* through baptism. There's no such thing as a solitary Christian. Are your standards superior to Christ's? Who sets the standard for being a Christian -- the Master or the disciple? There are certain things we need to do *as a people*, not just as individual persons. Sure, we can pray on our own, and should be doing so; but then we bring that to church to join our faith and prayers and sacrifices to those of everyone else, hearing God's Word and offering our sacrifice to the Father in union with Christ."

Friend: "Yeah, but where does he say, 'Go to Mass'? It's not in the Bible."

Priest: "Now, you know better than to make a dumb argument like that. Christ was a faithful Jew, and the Gospel says he went to synagogue on the sabbath *as was his custom*. If worshiping God with the people of the Covenant was good enough for the *Son* of God, I'm surprised that you'd consider yourself exempt."

Friend: "Aw, now you're makin' me feel guilty, man. . ."

Priest: "I suspect you were already there, my friend, or you wouldn't have brought it up. I'll make it easy for ya. Just consider your status as 'between confessions.' Go make a good one, and get yourself back to church. We need you, lots more than you think you need us. And I'm not talking about your envelope. I'm concerned about your soul, *and* the encouragement you can bring to others who will benefit just from your witness by *being there*. Welcome back, in advance!"

Not just “becoming” a person . . . The ability of science and medicine to bring the physical elements of human life together in a test tube has created unique ethical and moral situations which the Scriptures never envisioned. God’s Word, however, *does* point a way for us to help untangle the messes so often resulting from our penchant to overcome one problem by making another.

Scripture considers children to be both a blessing and a gift. How often the Church repeats the words of Psalm 127:3-5, “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior’s hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.”

Now, the post-modern cynic might ask, in shrill tones, “What about the woman, the mother? Typical of the Bible to concentrate only on patriarchy!” Not so fast. Can you ever imagine that a mother would forget her baby? God has an answer for that: “Can a woman forget the baby at her breasts, or not have compassion for the child of her womb? Yet even should *she* forget, **I** shall never forget *you!*” (Isaiah 49:15). See? It’s never good to jump to modern conclusions about the ageless Word of God. Consider that perhaps God *has to* address far more words to men, encouraging them in virtue, because men can be so darned obtuse, clueless, and pig-headed. At least, that’s the beginning of *my* every confession. But I digress.

Back to the point. Children are a blessing and a gift. It is *God* who is the Author of life, all life and each life. Parents are *pro*-creators, invited by God to share their sacrificial, sacramental love, to exercise their marital privilege, and to put themselves at God’s service should he wish to bring new life about through their cooperation. Given the right circumstances, this often happens. In fact, some 7.5 billion people populate the earth at present, in witness to this loving and creative action of God through human actors. The Church considers *in vitro* (“within the glass”) fertilization (IVF) to be as morally wrong as artificial contraception. It’s not only the artificiality of each procedure that is problematic, it’s the mind of those engaged in the actions. In the case of contraception, the blessing and gift of a child is being deliberately frustrated and rejected. In the case of artificial fertilization, life is brought about by technological means, removing the most essential opening to life from the marital embrace itself. The Church has the maternal duty to remind the anxious couple longing for children that while they must be open to life, children are not a *right*. This is a hard saying to a generation that assumes that any object of the human will thereby becomes a right.

Typically, IVF treatment and the creation of human embryos are the consequences of a generally accepted belief that parents have a right to pursue a child at whatever cost, in whatever manner. When IVF is used, excess embryos result. Those not implanted in the mother’s womb are then frozen and stored. There are over 600,000 frozen embryos in the U.S. alone. Psalm 139 states that God “knit me in my mother’s womb.” God tells Jeremiah (1:5), “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” God did the forming, and knew us intimately even prior to our embryonic state. So creating “surplus” human life is an undignified and immoral view of early human life, which is full and genuine human life at any stage, by *God’s* design. And just as “compassion” for the terminally ill can easily slide into euthanasia, and loss of respect for the dead has morphed into turning their remains into mementos, the predictable has already happened in Australia with our embryonic brothers and sisters. An enterprise named Baby Bee

Hummingbirds takes “surplus” human embryos, cremates them, and places them in jewelry. Tastelessness knows no bounds, particularly when we are no longer governed -- or “burdened” -- with any sense of being made in the image and likeness of God, whose name be blessed forever. May he bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “*Things* rust and break. But every *child* is a universe of possibility that reaches into eternity” (Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., of Philadelphia (1944-), speaking at the NAPA Institute in California on August 1, 2017).