

BULLETIN – DECEMBER 4

Advent: Waiting for Diversity. The secularists who make a display of scorning or at least giving up on religious faith are often enough quick to adopt something else to take its place. Some become fervent vegans. Those whose passion is countering climate change are as dogmatic as any Grand Inquisitor. Globalists work diligently for a borderless world with no allegiance to any nation state or ethnic group. And those who, like many politicians, express a “commitment to diversity” pledge themselves to move the human race along by force into what nature and the passage of time ultimately do best. A person of faith might refer to that latter process as “the plan of God.”

All of the groups and causes we’ve mentioned promote certain ritualistic actions, the likes of which they eschew in any formal religious faith. Vegans weigh and measure and discriminate with food in a manner that would make an Orthodox rabbi seem like an omnivorous hedonist. Climate change devotees participate in recycling and other exercises with a nearly sacramental devotion. Globalists take on and try to impose on others a “new way of thinking” reminiscent of the way St. Paul speaks to his converts in Ephesians 4:23: “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” Finally, many of those who spend their energies being feverishly committed to diversity do so with what could only be called a religious fervor. The big difference is that the ultimate goal of religious fervor is heaven, while those who are committed to diversity apparently lower their expectations and simply wish to have society reach perfection here on earth. If they believed in original sin, they would know they are likely doomed to disappointment.

Many of these new “cults” embrace laudable and worthwhile practices for reasons that might seem odd to believers. That doesn’t negate the value of some of the practices. Care of our diet is practically synonymous with care of our health. Recycling does indeed ease the earth’s burden of some of our extravagant or convenient living. New ways of thinking are always welcome for exploration, always in the light of the gospel. And tolerance for and appreciation of healthy diversity in its many forms is obviously more virtuous than hatred and bigotry.

Christ gives his Church our marching orders as he prepares to ascend to heaven: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Note that he doesn’t say “*eliminate* all nations,” perhaps a crushing blow to the globalists. He doesn’t order us to eradicate national or ethnic boundaries or cultures or traditions or to impose an external uniformity through global regulations. Rather, baptism and belief in Christ can provide people of EVERY nation the fulfillment of everything to which their cultures can only point. This is a whole theme of the apostolic preaching and writing of Peter and Paul and of the whole Church. The fact that the Catholic Church from its origins blossomed into a variety of rites, languages, and styles of worship manifests our adaptability to the various peoples of the earth, who can now worship God with one heart and voice while retaining familiar customs and ways not inimical to their salvation.

Not all cultures are equal. Some behaviors are truly primitive and barbaric. People who do offensive physical harm to others must be restrained and retrained. Certain languages are far more difficult for non-native speakers to learn than are others. Some things that believers consider right or wrong are truly right or wrong for everyone,

simply by their nature and object. To think otherwise is not to embrace diversity. It is to be insane.

I pray that Castro goes to heaven. Don't be shocked. That's not because he butchered so many people in Cuba to gain and maintain power for over half a century. That's not because he was the reason for so many families being split up and fleeing into prolonged exile from their homeland. That's not because his murderous stubbornness led to an embargo which kept his nation far behind many others economically. That's not because he openly persecuted members of his native Catholic faith and many other believers. That's not because in many ways he ran his island nation like a big prison, allowing people a very few basic human freedoms only at the price of silence and submission.

No, I pray that Castro goes to heaven because I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ. And although there was not much evidence that it happened before his death, maybe, just maybe, Fidel had moments of spiritual lucidity leading up to his passing from this world. He had exhibited some softening toward religion in recent years. He had had cordial visits from Pope St. John Paul II and from Pope Francis. He admitted some benevolent feelings toward Christianity and his native Catholicism as far as their social vision went. His knowledge of Jesus Christ doesn't seem to have gone far beyond thinking of Christ as a social revolutionary; but he had constructed the whole of his own life rather myopically in those terms.

None of this can erase the horrible things that he personally did or ordered or allowed to happen to people in the name of his revolution. Typical of most dictators, he had a ferocious temper, and could deal with opposition only by eliminating it. There was no room in his worldview to see Christ as a Savior. But was it not for such people that Christ came to earth? Christ, who came "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10)? And few people have been more lost than those who have dealt death to their fellow humans as though it were a deck of cards—Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and yes, Fidel Castro, although he can barely hold a candle to some of the others.

Many things that Fidel did during his life were very bad, and deserve eternal death. But the same Jesus who loved him at his baptism 90 years ago has never stopped loving him. The same Jesus who said, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:39). If Fidel is lost forever, it will be because, like it could be with any one of us, he deliberately, foolishly, and finally rejected God and everything about him. But that's not GOD'S will. Because God chastises those whom he loves (Hebrews 12:6), someone like Fidel, if he is to come to salvation, may have to have a very severe and intense experience of The Purgatory, the action of God's justice, love, and mercy applied to the soul of each one who needs it in the way he needs it. Most of us will likely not escape some aspect of that purgatory experience when we die, which is why the Church never refuses prayer for ANY sinner who has departed this life. Public and unrepented sin might prevent us from having "Christian burial," but it never stops the Church from the spiritual work of mercy of praying for the sinner, no matter who he or she might be..

Some of our compatriots might have been shocked to see TV news clips of people in Catholic churches in Cuba lighting candles at the news of Castro's death. Some of those vigil lights no doubt were for those whose deaths and exile he caused. But some of

them no doubt were for Castro himself, perhaps because some of our fellow Catholics in that nation just 90 miles from our Florida shores have a different perspective on someone who has loomed large in their lives for nearly six decades. And because the Holy Spirit allows no monopoly on the Good News of Jesus Christ, some of them might just have something to teach the rest of us.

Congratulations to the West Catholic, Catholic Central, and Muskegon Catholic Central high school football teams for taking the state titles in their respective divisions! Our Falcons, Cougars, and Crusaders exhibit what the Roman poet Juvenal (c. A.D. 100) considered to be first among the things most desirable in life: *Mens sana in corpore sano* (“A sound mind in a sound body”). Thank you all for bringing honor to your schools and to your Church. And thank you for helping ease the pain of the Wolverines’ loss to the Buckeyes’ officials. (Go ahead, Big Ten. Fine me!) God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “Sin is the failure to live freedom excellently” (George Weigel, Catholic scholar and commentator, 1951-).