

BULLETIN -- FEBRUARY 19

No surprise there . . . Shortly after the vote of the U.S. Senate and the Vice President confirming Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, Michigan Sen. Debbie Statusquo said that she's heard from "an overwhelming number of Michigan families who have shared their strong concerns about her (DeVos') long record of pushing policies that have seriously undermined public education in Michigan and failed our children." Now, what Sen. Statusquo *doesn't* say is that perhaps she's been overwhelmed at the number of Michigan families who have indeed shared strong concerns. But perhaps she's been overwhelmed that many of the families who took the time to communicate with her office actually *avored* DeVos' long record! Perhaps she was overwhelmed by the number of Michigan residents who are literate enough and care enough to actually communicate their strong feelings about these things. And perhaps it was overwhelming for her to find out that it's actually been those special-interest groups who have a vested interest in re-electing people like Sen. Statusquo who have undermined public education in Michigan and failed our children by working to eliminate healthy competition. I haven't heard any parents who have chosen religious schools or charter schools for their children express fear about "failing our children." Moreover, I haven't heard parents or grandparents who have children in our public schools complaining that their children receive a sub-standard education *because* religious or charter schools exist! Up until the charter schools were established, public schools basically received *all* the tax money earmarked for education, *all* the time. And it was in part *because* the public schools were failing to produce an educated citizenry *in spite of* all that money, that charter schools were established. They were established to 1) provide students with a tax-supported education that would be worth something, and 2) to provide failing school systems with the stimulus of competition, with the hope that they would work hard to improve themselves. Instead, we got people like a former public school superintendent who earned (not!) a fat six-figure salary (and a fat severance payoff) for coming up with brilliant ideas like the "H" grade, which was scrapped as a failed attempt to pretend that no student ever got a failing grade. (Yes, the same superintendent whose administration allowed students to wear pajama bottoms to school! Now, *that* surely improved the quality of education, as well as preparing future workers for the work force!!) So, from a pastoral perspective, three cheers for anyone who thinks they have a better idea than the hole we've been digging for ourselves. We've been throwing good money after bad into a system that has for several generations been failing to produce people who can intelligently discuss more than what we find in the average "Comment" section of social media news reports. Why is this a pastoral concern? Because *they are all our children*, Catholic or not, in Catholic schools or not. As a Church, we have a pastoral responsibility for *everyone*; and that means we have a vested interest in promoting a healthy and vigorous public education system that does justice for *every* child and family. Thanks be to God, we seem currently to have a local public school administration that is a vast improvement over the recent past, and takes its responsibilities to the whole community very seriously. We assure them of our enthusiastic cooperation to ensure that every student entrusted to them and to us will come to know—and value—the difference between an emery board and a mortar board.

And speaking of all our children, we applaud all those who showed up at Planned Parenthood and the abortion clinic to support federal de-funding of the nation's No. 1 abortion provider. However, I would offer a word of caution. The news item from MLive highlighted the signage held by both sides of the protest. Of course, the PP supporters were generally reported as having had the signs that were bold, creative, and in-your-face, while the pro-life signage was reported as tending to be rather tame and predictable. The number of comments on that news item was skyrocketing by early Sunday afternoon, and it wasn't pretty. My word of caution is this: Don't try to score points by getting into wars of wits and words, either at protests or in print. The evil one is supremely clever, and the vitriol that pours out of people who are not appalled at the very thought of abortion does not come from the human heart alone. Just as in an exorcism, the exorcist is warned by the Church NOT to argue with or try to outsmart the enemy, so we are best advised not to get into this kind of fruitless back-and-forth with opponents on this or many other hot-button issues without sufficient preparation. Keep in mind that among the opponents at any such gathering (as Rep. Amash is encountering in his town hall meetings) are well-funded, organized, and trained protesters who are moved from place to place and city to city to shout down and drown out anyone whom their bosses target.

The Church is blessed with any number of apologists who are TRAINED to respond with the sorts of things about which we all say, "Gee, I wish I had thought of that." You and I, the average Catholic woman and man, girl and boy, are best advised to not be drawn into these often-vicious exchanges. Our opponents are just baiting us, trying to get us to say or write something that they can throw back in our faces and use to portray us as smug hypocrites and mindless troglodytes. And they will never allow us to simply express a personal opinion. If we accidentally say something foolish or reciprocally sarcastic, all of Christianity and all of Catholicism will be reviled and mocked for our lack of finesse, as well as for all of our sins and shortcomings. Our faith doesn't need those kinds of "favors." The best dialogue to carry on when we are in positions of confrontation, like at the abortion clinic, is with God in prayer, for the unborn and for those who consider unborn lives not worth saving. There are times to engage, but they are rare, and must be governed by the utmost charity and by a respect that truly takes the high road. Show the utmost kindness to the opponents. If water is being passed out, make sure there's enough to offer to them. Be considerate and courteous to the max. If someone calls you a name, smile and say, "Thank you, I'll take that." But don't let them drag you into *Roe v. Wade* rage.

February 23: St. Polycarp of Smyrna (A.D. 69-155). Polycarp was a disciple of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, part of the next generation after the Apostolic age. Think of it: learning about Christ from one who had walked with him and stood at the foot of the Cross and taken Christ's Mother into his home! Polycarp recalled and recorded things about St. John's preaching and personality. In turn, St. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202) was born at Smyrna and was a disciple of Polycarp. See how the truth of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, was passed on by both written word and word of mouth from the Apostles down to our own day! Irenaeus recalls an incident from the life of Polycarp, which shows us that zeal for the truth did not allow these early Christians to settle for being merely politically correct: "Polycarp himself on one occasion came face

to face with Marcion (an early heretic who taught that a god greater than God the Father of Christ had created the world), and when Marcion said ‘Don’t you recognize me?’ he replied: ‘I do indeed: I recognize the firstborn of Satan!’ So careful were the apostles and their disciples to avoid even exchanging words with any falsifier of the truth.” God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “The most important thing about children is the need to prepare them properly for responsible citizenship. The primary objective should not be raising a straight-A student who excels at three sports, goes to an A-list university and becomes a prominent brain surgeon. The primary objective is to raise a child such that community and culture are strengthened. ‘Our child is the most important person in our family’ is the first step toward raising a child who feels entitled. You don’t want that. Your child doesn’t need that. And neither does America” (John Rosemond, North Carolina family psychologist and biblical counselor).