

BULLETIN -- JULY 25-26

As St. Anne's Novena concludes this Sunday evening, July 26, with our devotions and solemn procession at 5 p.m., let's remember to pray for the Church and people of Québec, the most Catholic Canadian province, where the devotion originated. Although it is still the "most Catholic" province in Canada, the influence and even the presence of the Church is greatly diminished these days. Québec is highly secular, and has often led the way in Canada in pressing for a retreat from Christian values and relegating them to the dustbin of history. Churches have emptied out faster than a Greek bank account, and many of even the most historic churches in the province are up for sale or being prepared for demolition. Vocations have dried up, the practice of the faith is scarcely to be found in many areas, and the traditional love of the Church among the faithful has soured, due in no small part to the horrors of sexual abuse coming to light on top of an already rampant anti-clericalism. Québec was the home of many of the ancestors of Michigan Catholics in Muskegon, Ludington, Manistee, Cheboygan, Alpena, Bay City, and Detroit, all the coastal areas. Many of our priests have had family roots in Québec. But as happens so often in areas that are almost completely Catholic, the faith was taken for granted, and the need for ongoing evangelization among the faithful was forgotten.

On a lighter note, the State of Michigan is awarding the Meijer store at 1540 28th Street, S.E., an official historical marker, the original "Thrifty Acres." That caught my notice and filled me with pride, because I was hired as an employee in the hardware department there when the store was still quite new. So now a place where I worked is on the State Historical Register. And most of the schools I went to are closed. There are days when I wake up feeling like a relic. A former seminary student, now ordained, who spent some time here was once asked, "What does Father eat for breakfast?" He glibly replied, "Fossil fuel." Harrumpphh! I'm glad I studied history when I was a kid, there wasn't as much of it.

A request for prayer. Father James Brooks, assistant pastor of St. Margaret of York Church in Loveland, OH, just outside Cincinnati, is under treatment for pancreatic cancer. Archbishop Dennis Schnurr of Cincinnati is a seminary classmate of mine. Father Brooks has been a very effective and much-beloved priest. His archbishop and his people are requesting prayers from all of us through the intercession of Venerable Bishop Frederic Baraga, who was sent from Cincinnati to spend his first couple years as a missionary right here in our Grand River valley, just a couple miles south of us. And so we join our prayers to theirs:

O God we thank you for the life and holiness of your Venerable servant Frederic Baraga and we pray that you will honor him by the title of Saint. In his life he dedicated himself to the missionary effort of your Church and spread the Gospel making you known, loved, and served by peoples to whom he ministered. As a man of holiness he brought your peace and love to all whom he encountered. Lord, grant us the graces and favor of a cure for the cancer suffered by Fr. James Brooks, his good health and well-being through the intercession of your venerable servant Frederic, we pray. In your Son's Holy Name. Amen

Brave new world. On Sunday evening, July 5, the CBS weekly newsmagazine *60 Minutes* re-ran a segment on genetic engineering. Medical science is now able to help many couples who carry a defective gene to have healthy babies who will not pass on the traits that can lead to crippling conditions or diseases. This all sounds very positive, especially for those whose marriages and families have known the challenges and joys of special needs children. But all that glitters is not ethical or moral gold.

In nearly every instance cited during the course of the program, the parents either 1) engaged in artificial insemination with donor sperm or egg, rupturing the unitive action of their sexual relationship; 2) underwent sterilization of one kind or another, removing their own procreative faculties; or 3) produced multiple embryos for genetic experimentation, ultimately resulting in the destruction and death of their own conceived sons and daughters who will never see the light of day. One couple admitted that they had prayed mightily for guidance before they engaged in the latter practice, because they knew and believed that they would be allowing the destruction of living human beings. The mom even acknowledged that they felt that they might be “playing God.” In the end, however, they were convinced because they were getting rid of the genetic defect for all their generations to come. They agreed to do evil in order to accomplish what at the moment seemed to be the greater good. The Church is filled with anguish with and compassion for parents in such situations. But we also say without equivocation that they made the *wrong* decision. If your doctor told you that the only way to save the life of your 5-year-old would be to transplant both kidneys from your 3-year-old and let the latter child die, would you allow it? Just because you can’t *see* the embryo or relate to it as you would to your 3-year-old doesn’t mean that God hasn’t already been at work from the moment of conception, giving that child a soul that will live forever.

The Church applauds the work of genetic research that is revealing more and more amazing things about the origins of difficulties that have plagued the human family since original sin. But we don’t heal those effects by engaging in further sin, in trying to build a perfect world by our own efforts. The most stunning and alarming moment in the *60 Minutes* presentation was when Princeton University professor Lee Silver, a molecular biologist, said that in due time, we shall see how foolish it is to conceive children through sexual intercourse. That, he said, will all be a thing of the past because it is counterproductive for the genetic health of the human race. “I see a future in which people will not use sex to reproduce. That’s a very dangerous thing to do. . . It’s safer to have a baby with this pre-knowledge, this genetic information that might help them avoid disease.” The academic need to control all the elements of reproduction is making all that possible. Clearly the doctor, brilliant and personable as he is, would not accept a single word of Pope Blessed Paul VI’s 1968 letter *On the Transmission of Human Life (Humanae vitae)*. What the doctor is saying and teaching would completely and definitively separate the unitive and procreative faculties of sexual relations. To be sure, this has already been done through contraception, pornography, and some of the genetic experimentation and engineering which has already been going on, just as Blessed Paul VI prophetically predicted that it would. But there’s more.

When a doctor solemnly proclaims that the messy business of human breeding (he didn’t say it that way, but certainly implied it) is actually dangerous for the health of the human race, you can be sure that the government and the insurance companies are all ears. The near, not the distant, future could well see the government getting involved and

making it illegal to conceive a child *in wedlock*, because non-contraceptive wedlock will be considered a high risk behavior, and the pregnancy and resulting child(ren) cannot be covered by the Affordable Care Act or any other form of health insurance. “Father,” you laugh scornfully, “don’t be ridiculous!! Hahaha, that would **NEVER** happen.” And you probably would have been just as scornful 30 years ago if someone had told you that the U.S. Supreme Court would one day declare that “marriage” was no longer restricted to one man and one woman, and that any contrary notion would be considered bigotry. Well, welcome to the brave new world! Wear those rosy-colored glasses and enjoy the earthly paradise we have created for you. God bless you!

Thought for the week: Like the people who designed them. many contemporary playgrounds and games are soft, pliable, inclusive, nurturing, and non-competitive. And no fun.