

BULLETIN – MAY 31

Ordinations coming up! Please keep in your prayers our deacons who will be ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Walkowiak on Saturday, June 6, at St. Andrew's. Deacon Douglas A. Braun will, as Father Braun, serve as assistant at St. Joseph's at Wright and the associated parishes. Deacon William R. VanderWerff, as Father VanderWerff, will serve as assistant at St. Francis de Sales in Holland. Our friend Father James VanderLaan is being transferred from Holland to be assistant at Holy Spirit. It is a happy day for the diocese when two parishes that did not have assistants gain the added witness and help of a second priest, with the expected enthusiasm of the newly ordained. I know, I know, assistants are now called *parochial vicars* in canon law. For a period of time, they were called *associates*. Whatever the title, when I held the position, I was always very clearly an *ASSISTANT*, as I was reminded by my pastors whenever I momentarily forgot my place in the pecking order. Human nature always trumps title.

In addition to all this, our seminarian acolytes Thomas J. Cavera, Patrick Jegar Fickel, Colin J. Mulhall, and Daniel P. Schumaker are to be ordained deacons in the same ceremony. Praised be Jesus Christ!

Natural law, natural guilt. Rick Hinshaw is the editor of *The Long Island Catholic* magazine. He has written a brilliant piece entitled "The Secularist Assault on America's Moral Consensus." He reviews how swiftly our society has reversed moral positions we have held for millennia, and we quote him at length here:

"The secularists are not satisfied simply to have torn down the moral standards that have guided our culture and informed our laws. They must also bring people of faith--and especially the Catholic Church--to heel, forcing us to *participate* in same sex marriage, in placing children for adoption with same sex or unmarried couples, in the destruction of pre-born life. Why?

"Part of it is strategic. If they can force people and institutions of faith to be actively involved in abortions, same sex weddings, or other anti-life or anti-family policies, how do we credibly maintain public opposition to those practices? Our voices are effectively discredited, and the culture war is over.

"I would suggest that it also has something to do with the natural law. Recall how King Henry VIII, when he wanted a divorce that the Church could not grant, simply named himself head of the Church of England, granted himself the divorce, and married the second of his six wives. Thomas More did not rebuke the King. He simply maintained his silence, unable to publicly assent to the marriage. But, as Randy Lee, professor of law at Widener University, writes . . ., 'that didn't seem like enough to Henry. . . Incrementally, like water torture, drop by drop, Henry took from Thomas More his office, then his status, then his wealth, then his friends, then his personal liberty, then his family, and ultimately his life.'

"Why? Why was Henry so obsessed with forcing Thomas More to assent to his divorce and remarriage? I would submit that it was because he was himself terribly conflicted, knowing deep within himself that what he had done was wrong. But if he could get Thomas More, a prominent Catholic of saintly virtue and impeccable integrity, to go along with the marriage, perhaps it could ease his conscience.

“Similarly, I submit, while our modern day secularists deny and ridicule the concept of a natural law, they cannot escape it--it is imprinted by God on every human heart. Somewhere, deep within, there is a nagging discomfort--within individuals and within our secularist nation as a whole--a discomfort that they do not understand, but cannot escape. But if they can force people of faith--and especially the Catholic Church, the foremost defender of the timeless moral teachings on which our nation was founded--to go along, maybe they can free themselves of the nagging doubts which they will not acknowledge but cannot escape.”

A conference of business leaders here in Grand Rapids recently sounded an alarm regarding the relationship between the workplace and education. There are approximately 4.2 million unfilled employment positions across the country. Meanwhile, we are told that more and more citizens are sinking into a tar pit of chronic unemployment in which they have simply stopped looking for work, either out of discouragement, lack of ability, lack of ambition, or lack of opportunity in their particular locale. Many have discovered that if they play the system, they can score more “stuff” by remaining down and out than they ever could by working at a regular job and having to pay for taxes, insurance, utilities, housing, food, medicine, and clothing. These people aren’t even counted in the government statistics dealing with the percentage of unemployment, which we are always jubilantly told is shrinking.

The vice president of the Business Roundtable, Mr. Dane Linn, noted about potential employers, “It is not that they don’t want to hire those workers; it’s because they can’t. There is a mismatch between what those candidates bring relative to knowledge, skills, behaviors and attitudes--not just the hard skills but also the soft skills.” The hard skills he refers to are the work and technical skills that education is meant to provide. The soft skills are the people skills that socialization is meant to provide--appearance, politeness, etc. Schools should obviously be helping to equip students with both, but it’s pretty difficult when there’s a family or cultural prejudice against learning and education as something for “uppity” folks.

Mr. Linn went on. “We have almost 6 million young people who aren’t working or in school. That’s a national emergency. If we can’t fill those jobs, not just Michigan but this country isn’t going to be internationally competitive.” No one knows this better than people in law enforcement, public safety, and emergency medicine. A huge chunk of their time (and our tax dollars) is taken up by people who have stopped thinking for themselves and doing for themselves. They live life in an almost feral manner. It is a tragic thing to see so many souls who have sunk so low as to have no vision, no hopes, no dreams. Somewhere along the line, something snapped. The cute baby, the youth filled with wonder, somehow these aspects of their personalities got buried beneath the rubble of a drug habit, an abusive relative, an attractive stranger, a promise of a scheme to get rich quick. We have many fragile people among us. They need our compassion and our prayer, but also our challenge to rejoin the human race and do something constructive in cooperation with others, not because it will earn them more money but because it will help restore their own sense of human dignity.

One thing I remember about the great late Monsignor Hugh Michael Beahan, Grand Rapids’ longtime TV and radio priest who died in 1980. He was warm and engaging in his manner, and had a deep and mellow voice that could melt hearts like

butter. But that wasn't just for show biz. I was privileged to live with him at the Cathedral for a while, and I knew him to be the same person with the same manner off-camera as on. He treated every derelict at the door as though they were visiting royalty, giving them a genuine and hearty welcome, jesting, teasing, bringing a smile to the face and a light to the eye. Always a word of encouragement and inspiration, whether at 7 in the morning or 11 at night. He was fond of saying, "I love every minute of this, and I can't believe they pay me for it!!" Those who came seeking a handout didn't always get what they thought they wanted, but they always got something far more valuable. They got treated like a human being, and I'd be willing to bet that not a few of them went away walking a little taller, feeling a little prouder, that *someone* recognized a dignity that they themselves had forgotten they had. Street people don't often come to church; so in the name of Christ, the Church has a duty to bring its witness to the street. They need Christ in the horrible disarray of their lives, but they'll rarely hear a word from a pulpit. It's something that money can't provide, but what a difference it can make! God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.