

BULLETIN – OCTOBER 30

Month of the Holy Souls. All Saints Day and All Souls Day are upon us this Tuesday and Wednesday. Opportunities for your participation at Mass on those days are abundant, and we urge you to join us. Praying for our beloved dead in the “harvest time” of our liturgical year is an esteemed practice, one not to be forgotten as even Catholics in our society become increasingly infected with attitudes and practices concerning the dead which are not just un-Christian, but aggressively **anti-Christian**. We’ll have more to say about this in the coming weeks. But just heighten your own awareness that the obituary columns these days are full of absolutely *atrocious* things being done to serve ourselves rather than the souls of those who have gone before us in faith. Stay tuned.

In place of our monthly Christian service collection next weekend, November 5-6, we shall have our once-every-three-years collection for the support of the Archdiocese for the Military Services. Timed for the weekend before Veterans Day, it is a way for us to honor and encourage those who spend much or a part of their lives serving our country in the various branches of national defense. There is a separate archdiocese with its own archbishop, auxiliary bishops, priests, and deacons who serve this scattered “local” church in many parts of the world, on bases, on battlefields, and in military hospitals. Unlike other dioceses, the churches and chapels associated with the military often do not have the means to support themselves. And yet they do a tremendous work for us, serving our young Catholic men and women at a time in their lives when they and their families are growing and maturing, when they are often most vulnerable to temptation and to alienation from the faith. Many are the returning soldiers who will bring a story of a chaplain who played a very significant role in their lives at a critical point. Please help us to make a difference in the life of faith of those who dedicate themselves to our service in this way.

Many of our Christian friends celebrate Reformation Day today, the last Sunday of October. It was 499 years ago, on October 31, 1517, that Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg. Intended as a theological challenge open to debate, it quickly became a tool for all those who were politically disgruntled and disaffected, leading to the greatest fracture in the unity of the Western Church in its history. It’s a good day for us to pray for Christian unity. That was what Christ prayed for so fervently at the Last Supper, in his high priestly prayer: “That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21). And why? “So that the world may believe that you have sent me” (*ibid.*).

Satan rejoices (in a diabolical way, to be sure) when the human race, which it despises, is fractured, broken, and torn apart from within. The reason for such evil rejoicing is all the greater when it’s **God’s People**, who are supposed to be a sign of unity and of God’s love to the rest of the world, who are themselves at each other’s throats. The Reformation came about because of a lack of virtue on the part of many, both before, during, and after. The Eucharist, the very sign of the unity and presence of the Body of Christ in our midst and of the Body of Christ which we are, had been allowed in so many places to become a slipshod, careless, hurried mumbling of formulas used and abused to raise money and pay salaries. The wisdom of the Fathers of the Church, which is today

winning so many Protestant pastors back to the fullness of the proclamation and the celebration of Christ's mysteries, was largely lost to the popular mind and heart. As in Jesus' own time, the temple needed cleansing, but not the rejection of the sacramental sign of the New and Eternal Covenant. The cement of the sad division of the Eastern and Western Churches had already been setting and curing for over 450 years, and doing untold harm to the Church's witness to the Muslim and pagan worlds. The Church badly needed reform, but not a further rupturing of its unity. And no one could be more gleeful about the continuing divisions than the evil one itself.

By the time the Catholic, Universal Church went through a profound reformation of its own at Trent (1545-63), the clouds of bitterness had settled over much of Europe, as well as over the new lands which were in process of discovery. Splinter churches sprang up so that today, an accurate count of them all is really impossible. Some theologians have even given up on the prayer of Christ, and shamelessly announce that disunity and division is really the will of God, so that his Church "might be all things to all people." What a corruption of the Scripture, just to satisfy our own pride and ego, and the inclinations of fallen human nature! Every time we Christians engage in internecine warfare ("It's *your* fault," "No, it's *your* fault," "Catholics aren't Christians," "We're the *only* Christians," and on and on), we chalk up another victory for the evil one. We do not, we cannot compromise on the truth; but we can strive to *live* that truth in love and charity with all our strength. Actions speak louder than words, especially when we are ill-equipped to employ words. Indifferentism and universalism are not the answer. It's easy to hurl insults and cast stones. Even the pagans can do that. We are to do better, even if some call it weakness. "By *this* will all know that you are *my* disciples, by the love you have for one another" (John 13:35). Isolation and separation only lead us to emphasize our differences rather than to rejoice in the common ground we have in Christ. There is no other way home but together.

What's true in the Church is true also in our country. The political climate leading up to this election is roaring evidence that the virtuous behavior of its citizens is a prerequisite for a democracy (or a representative republic) to thrive. There must be a genuine expectation that we genuinely wish each other's good, and that we work and sacrifice to assure it. While we have been fussing and professing to be shocked, the virtues have been mocked and scourged and spit upon. Vice can only spawn disunity and disharmony, and the fruits of half a century of legalizing vices are everywhere: the rancor in Congress, the road rage, the quick fix of settling problems with weapons, abortion and disrespect for life and the personhood of others, domestic violence, broken homes and families, human trafficking, ubiquitous despair and suicide, all these things are the predictable results of casting aside everything that has been taught as virtuous behavior. Without any resort to the Creator (separation of church and state, you know!), the only thing we have to throw at our rampant misbehavior is more and more money—which, after all, becomes god to people who have nothing else. And then we are bewildered when each succeeding generation is worse off for all our wasted billions.

Sadly, neither major party has much to offer in the hope of any resolution of these problems. We are back to the days of the Roman Empire, or at least of the Soviet Union, when the Church could function best once its members accepted the fact that they were being called to *joyfully live the Gospel of Jesus Christ* in the midst of a society which

desperately tried to throw off the “shackles” of its past and its best traditions. So let’s do it, folks! Cast your vote, as you MUST if you’re serious about your Christian responsibility. But remember, that’s only a tiny part of our duty. The day after the election, no matter who crows or cackles “victory,” must be just a continuation of the duty urged upon us by our apostolic patron St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (2:14-15). And again: “Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all” (4:4-5). And remember, he wrote in a time and place where the blood was flowing, and baptism was becoming a death warrant! We still have it relatively easy. For the moment. God bless you!

Thought for the week: Being shrewd means knowing what doesn’t matter.