

BULLETIN -- OCTOBER 4

Fall Festival report. Thank you, thank you, thank you to all who spent countless hours working for the success of our annual Fall Festival! It was the most spectacular in recent memory. Dinners served, tickets sold, everything was at least double what we were used to. So many invited former parishioners and friends to join us, there was a steady stream of diners coming into the gym for about four hours. There was something going on for everyone, and I didn't see anyone looking bored. Once again, congratulations to our big raffle winners, Cody Tompkins, Rosalie McCormick, Grace Kamantas, and Joseph Lucas. And sincere thanks to all of you for the generosity and encouragement you manifested toward the author of this column. What a wonderful congregation you are, and what a privilege it is to serve as your pastor!

Pray and Spray results. We're happy to announce, albeit belatedly, the results of the August 12 annual softball game between the local priests and their associates, and the members of the Grand Rapids Fire Department. Youth and vitality once again triumphed over maturity and seasoning, and the fire fighters pulled out a narrow victory, 15-9. The real winners, of course, were the campers at the Great Lakes Burn Camp in Mattawan. A fine sum of \$377 was raised for that worthy cause, and we are deeply grateful to all who came out to cheer on for charity.

The happy gift of a Catholic conscience. I had a girl friend years ago who yelled at me once for saying "I'm sorry" all the time. "You're always sorry," she hollered, "even though you didn't do anything!! Why do you keep apologizing for everything??"

"I'm Catholic," I replied meekly, "I'm guilty until proven otherwise."

I can remember regularly sitting in grade school in a class of 50+ when Sister would re-enter the room and begin raging, "ALL RIGHT, WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR . . .?" and then zero in on whatever it was that was broken, stolen, missing, etc. Whenever that happened, 50+ of us would freeze in place and excrete bricks, hurriedly examining our consciences until we heard what the problem actually was, and then you could hear a huge collective sigh of relief from usually all but two or three who were actually guilty. They would go off to the stocks, the whipping post, the principal's office, the guillotine, or the rectory, depending on the severity of the crime, and the rest of us would get back to work.

"Great taste!" "Less filling!" Well, which is it? In the 1980's, the Miller Brewing Company made a fortune off its ads featuring people squaring off in this light-hearted controversy. Of course, if you happened to like Miller Lite, both were right. If you were a fan of some other beer, you were either neutral or negative. But most people agreed it was a great ad campaign.

Not so light-hearted is a similar square-off that was brewing before, and really intensified during and after, the visit of Pope Francis to Cuba, the United States, and the United Nations. Various camps in the Church and in politics have claimed Francis is either on "their" side or the side of the "opposition," whoever they imagine that to be. As George Weigel pointed out in his May 6 lecture at the Acton Institute, Pope Francis is a man who defies easy categorization. But these days, when everything except elementary

school academics and sports seems to be driven by competition and conquest, it quickly devolves into at least verbal fisticuffs.

“Love!” “Orthodoxy!” “Forgiveness!!” “Truth!!” These good words all representing very good things are being tossed about like vicious challenges to one another, both within the Church and in the wider political sphere. If you love Christ, you will find each of these words resonating in your mind and heart in a beautiful way. If you are neutral or negative, you might say “Does not apply” or “I hate it all, and everything it all stands for!” And then, if you are in the world of politics, you are likely to seize on one of these words to the exclusion of the others, and then condemn all those who choose a different word.

Some Catholics are disturbed and thinking that the Holy Father missed a chance to stand up for truth and life by not being more explicit in his exhortations to value truth and life. He told Congress to “protect and defend human life at every stage of its development,” basing his remarks on Christ’s Golden Rule. What could that possibly mean but a condemnation of abortion and assisted suicide, among other evils against life? But it was too soft, many say. The media jump on it and claim that he downplayed these important facets of Catholic teaching, deciding instead to emphasize problems like climate change and unbridled capitalism.

The media love to harp, to reiterate the same themes over and over again until they weary everyone into saying, “Okay, that must be the way we should think about it.” The Catholic faith is far too broad to fit neatly into media sound bites. And Pope Francis, like his predecessors, draws on it all. It is like a tapestry, weaving a variety of threads and strands into a marvelous means of conveying God’s revelation. The media are far too impatient to try to capture all that. And no single preacher, be he pope or parish priest, can, as one of our wise seminary professors once warned us, “preach on everything from Genesis to Revelation in one sermon.”

The Lord Jesus faced a similar problem. He was assailed by the Pharisees who said there was NOTHING more important than obeying the Mosaic Law. His efforts to direct them to the mind of God who gave the Law through Moses were met with stubborn resistance. In their eyes, he was soft on public sinners and tax collectors.

Those who used to see communists hiding behind every bush now see proponents of the New World Order everywhere. Don’t get me wrong: there ARE people who believe in the New World Order, and are working hard to enforce it on all mankind. (Good luck, no one has ever succeeded in enforcing ANYTHING on all mankind up to now!) Just because certain aspirations of the Holy Father happen to coincide with certain economic or ecological goals of the New World Order folks doesn’t mean he’s one of them. That’s conspiracy theory. And that was what Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil meant when he jokingly complained, “When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist.”

Those who worry and fret about Pope Francis seem to forget that he is a Jesuit (and therefore a teacher) through and through. He chose the name Francis with St. Francis of Assisi in mind. His background and experience are distinctly Latin American. Buenos Aires is the second largest metropolitan area in South America, with 12.9 million people. As its archbishop for 15 years (1998-2013), Cardinal Bergoglio never stopped walking the walk with common, ordinary, everyday people, riding the bus, living in a small apartment, making his own phone calls. As the Bishop of Rome, he has continued

the same pattern and style of life. Whatever the commentators say about him, they must admit that he is no addict of creature comforts, and eschews pomp and circumstance. He is not a dramatic liturgist by any means, but he loves to shoot from the hip when he preaches. Like his namesake, he lives simply. His thinking and speaking must be studied in that light, and not merely in the categories set up by radio talk-show hosts who have their own agenda. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “Faith is an oasis in the heart which will never be reached by the caravan of thinking” (Khalil Gibran, 1883-1931, Lebanese-American poet and writer).