

Sunday, 33 Week of Ordinary Time
15 November 2020
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We are colored by everything surrounding us in these days. Someone asked me the other day, “Has the pandemic changed the way you pray?” It was a question that gave me pause. I immediately responded, “Yes.” However, at the time I couldn’t come up with anything concrete to describe what is behind my “Yes.” I’ve allowed the question to settle in... I would say that my prayer, because of what the pandemic has stirred in the world, in our nation, and in this community, my prayer is more focused, more deliberate, and I would say, more severe. These words express something of what that change is about. Maybe this is a better way to put it: before pandemic times I really needed prayer, in pandemic times I really, really need prayer. So I am colored by COVID. We all are for various reasons.

We are colored by this post-election time as a nation. Predictable, in some sense that we are where we are with some ambiguity as to who won, states recounting ballots, accusations of fraud, but looking at who seems to have won, I’ve been reading articles and doing my due diligence in trying to keep up with what is happening. I was in a conversation the other day, where we were asking the question, “What are the next steps?” Many said they want to jump right to peace and unity. It’s typical that we want what is comfortable fast and expedient. I’m not so sure peace and unity are going to be the next steps, at least not easily and not expediently, not just yet. All of this can color us in some way.

I look at more recent happenings in our own Catholic Church with the Cardinal McCarrick Report being released from the Vatican. If you follow the news or have news on your homepage, you could not have helped but heard or seen something of this. Again, predictable, how many in our secular media wants to jump on blame ... and don’t get me wrong there are people to blame and people who need to pay the price, in this life or the next, for their personal responsibility in this scandal ... but, I mentioned on All Saints Day the work of the cancel culture, well, the cancel culture wants to cancel out our Popes beginning with St. John Paul II, because our secular media works off the presumption that the world should revolve around America, instead of considering how these European leaders of a worldwide Church community were deceived and lied to by what should have been not only reliable sources, but most importantly, holy individuals who failed in their sanctity. And to some degree, we all do this, when it comes to sin. So certainly, I am colored by all this.

Those are just the big things. There are many other things, other issues, pressing concerns that some in our community are dealing with besides this stuff: addiction in the family, divorce unwanted, vocational choices out of reach, God’s will interfering with “my will be done.” And then the death of loved ones and their loss being overwhelming. These are real issues too, that some in this community are facing. All these things can color us as well.

I have more personal opinions and thoughts on all this, I could go on and on about any one of these issues and take it down a path of no return. Our sense these days is to turn to social media and jump on that bandwagon and see which pop musical star is saying what now, instead of singing their silly love songs? What sports figure is doing what now, instead of playing their children’s game? What popular reality figure is posting what now, instead of living an actual real life? But this is where the unrest comes, the lack of peace, the disunity. It comes from people who talk before they think, people who run from thoughtful silence and so give unrestful opinions, people who relativize truth and shrug off virtue. We are colored by this... sometimes contribute to it, sometimes feed off of it. It leaves us feeling confused and empty and angry even.

Well, here's a remedy... We just heard God speak to us. I hope you believe this and not just when I say this or when I remind you, but I hope you believe this. I hope every time you come to Mass that you even expect this. When scripture is read, God is talking – an ancient Word is made ever new in our modern day hearing. I don't turn to the Gospel this weekend. Rather, I look to St. Paul as he writes to the Thessalonians and to us... "let us not sleep as the rest do... stay sober and alert."

For us, this is not a time to be sleepy about our Catholic faith. This is not a time to disregard what Proverbs, that first reading says, about your Mother, my spouse ... the work of the Church and every aspect of Her, Catholic way of life and Her, Catholic spirituality. This is a time to stay sober and alert during all these things that can't help but color us in a certain way, change us even. Saints became saints because of the circumstances of their times. The circumstances of our times, is calling for sanctity and saintliness. Blessed Fulton Sheen said this, "Character is not revealed when life shows its best side, but when it shows its worst."

And I cannot emphasize this enough, pray. I mean pray in a more focused way, determined way, even a severe way. Let me suggest, this kind of praying ... pray by listening ... the only way to listen to God is how we listen to anyone we love. First, we give the one we love the time. We sit down with them face to face. So, give God time.

Second, we remain silent and we listen for not just ideas and words, but also we go deeper and are attentive to tone and emotion. Being silent with God. Yes, sometimes this silent time will evoke a spoken word or a thought may come to mind, but also, the silent time with God will evoke within us a tone and an emotion to pray with and hold onto. God talks to us in this way as well. Don't be afraid of the emotion.

Third, put aside the "me, myself, and I." Sometimes we enter into a conversation without concern for what is being said and more concerned about what is my response going to be. We can be easily distracted by unnecessary things. When it comes to God, lose yourself with Him. Do nothing... just sit and wait and expect Him. Don't fill up the prayer time with reading or writing or doing other things.

And if God only wants to stare at you, get lost in His loving gaze.

Don't fall asleep to this. Be alert and be sober. In this way the things that color our lives, for better or worse, will be even more so colored by the life of our Catholic faith and the life of our God.