

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Apps and Operating Systems”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Peace be with you!

[*At Vietnamese Martyrs:* Again, it is a joy to be here with you at Vietnamese Martyrs to celebrate this important day in the life of our Church. When Saint Peter describes our Church as built from living stones, you can see what he means by that by looking around you. This church and buildings on this property are impressive...but not as impressive as the people who worship, work and volunteer here. The mother of our Church is of course our mother Mary who today we venerate in a special way in this celebration in honor of Our Lady of Lavang. May our faith be strengthened by the witness of the Vietnamese people who during a time of great persecution chose to live hidden in a jungle with all the suffering that came with that so they could practice their Catholic faith. Thank you again for welcoming me here to be with you today.]

[*At St. Vincent de Paul:* Again, it is a joy to be here with you this morning to celebrate Fr. Dion’s ten-year anniversary. At first glance, it doesn’t seem like a long time, does it? However, when you think about how the world was in 2016 and what the world looks like today, it has been a ride. In 2016, no one ever heard of Covid. Today, the world has forever changed because of those days. In 2016, the Cubs won the world series for the first time since 1908. Ten years later, the Mariners still haven’t made it. Imagine that. In 2016, Taylor Swift dated Tom Hiddleston for three months. In 2026, nobody cares. I am pretty sure no one did then either. What I found interesting though is that in 2016, Google launched Google Assistant that utilized AI to recognize voice commands, that could help with calendaring and such. Look where the world is today! Speaking of which...]

Have you all read Pope Leo’s newest encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*? I highly recommend it. This encyclical is already having a far-reaching impact on the conversation the world is having on artificial intelligence. Throughout the encyclical, Pope Leo contrasts the civilization that built the Tower of Babel and Nehemiah’s culture that rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. You see, the mindset of the people who constructed the tower was bent on asserting power over others and even God. Nehemiah’s culture, on the other hand, rebuilt the wall collaboratively as a community that desired first and foremost to do the will of God.

The juxtaposition of the two mindsets is very helpful for the conversation the world is having over AI. Which culture will we choose to be? However, for this homily, I want to tease out how these differing mindsets play out in our own personal relationship with God using our smart phones as an example.

You see, I think the temptation we have is to treat Jesus; and faith in general, like an app on our phone. When we are at church, we open our “Jesus app.” When we leave, we close it and open my “passing the other driver on the road” app. At the store, we open the “what do I want to eat” app. At home, it is a choice between the “time to mow the grass app” or “open the bag of potato chips” app. Once the tv is turned on, we choose whether to open our “sports app”, “politics app”, or “entertainment app”. My point here is that we tend to treat our faith like an application that we open and close like any other activity in life.

The problem though is when Jesus offers us salvation through his passion, death, and resurrection, he is not looking to become another app on our phone. He wants to be our operating system itself. We see this clearly in our Gospel reading this Sunday. Jesus says, “Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” He goes on to say, “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.” What does he mean by that? What Jesus is essentially saying here is this. All the “apps” we access in our souls like family, school, work, sports and our politics ought to be extensions of our faith in Jesus Christ, who alone can offer us, and our family members for that matter, eternal life. Our phones can’t save us. Only Jesus can, so Jesus comes first! We can also understand St. Paul in our second reading in the same way. For him, the waters of baptism switches inside of us one operating system for another. He says, “Brothers and sisters: Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Think about what that means. Like St. Paul tells us, it means we must think of ourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus. Again, Jesus isn’t one app alongside others. For true believers, he is the operating system itself. For Saint Paul, anything in our life that is contrary to our relationship with Jesus should therefore short circuit us a little.

Back to Magnifica Humanitas, I think the analogy of how we use our apps on our phones is helpful because the culture that built the Tower of Babel placed God and humanity on equal footing, they were separate apps. Nehemiah’s culture placed God first in all things because faith was the operating system upon which everything else depended. A good spiritual exercise this week might be to ask ourselves the question: do I treat Jesus like another app on my phone or is Jesus my operating system? Am I with Babel or am I with Nehemiah? If we answer correctly, we may just find out that we need to delete certain activities or behaviors that are incompatible with a relationship with Jesus and our identity as a Roman Catholic. We also might discover that we need to download more virtues like compassion and charity for others, especially towards those who live on the margins of society.

[For Fr. Dion, as we celebrate your ten-year anniversary, my prayer for you is that you keep being you. Keep doing what you are doing. The reason why you are a good priest and good pastor is because your relationship with the Lord is at the heart of who you are. Everyone here agree with me? For the rest of us...]

My friends, [as we celebrate Our Lady of Lavang, and reflect on the witness of the Vietnamese Catholics she appeared to] what would it look like this week if everything we are, everything we think, and everything we do reflected our relationship with Jesus Christ? That discernment requires prayer that we simply must make more time for. Life is simply better when the code our inner operating system runs on is faith.