The Solemnity of Christ the King "Our Actions Speak Louder than Words"

Bishop Frank Schuster

Peace be with you! Again, it is a joy to be here with you at the Black Catholic Advisory Circle annual conference exploring the theme of Historical Presence and Reparatory Justice. With you, I am grateful to Pope Leo XIV for courageously acknowledging and apologizing for how long it took before the Church universally condemned slavery. He writes, "This constitutes a wound in Christian memory, one from which we cannot consider ourselves detached. [176] It is impossible not to feel deep sorrow when contemplating the immense suffering and humiliation endured by so many in stark contrast to their immeasurable dignity as persons infinitely loved by the Lord. For this, in the name of the Church, I sincerely ask for pardon." Thank you Pope Leo! Of course, this conference, like so many people, now asks a very good question, what now?

I spent all last week at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's fall plenary gathering in Baltimore. It was there in 2018 when the pastoral against racism Open Wide our Hearts was published. When asking ourselves the question, I am moved by the following quote from that document. "Too many good and faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life. We are not finished with the work. The evil of racism festers in part because, as a nation, there has been very limited formal acknowledgement of the harm done to so many, no moment of atonement, no national process of reconciliation and, all too often a neglect of our history. Many of our institutions still harbor, and too many of our laws still sanction, practices that deny justice and equal access to certain groups of people. God demands more from us. We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just." That is a powerful statement.

My friends, what was true in 2018 is true today, and I would argue, even more so. That is the feeling among bishops as well. In fact, last week, we voted overwhelmingly in favor of establishing the last Sunday of October every year as a National Day of Prayer for Racial Justice. It passed 180-15, so we need to work on the 15 whoever they are. I voted for it because as a country, I feel like we are going backwards, not forwards. Do you feel that way? I also believe the conference here at Seattle University comes at a good time. Apologies are not enough. Pastoral letters are not enough. Just like the sacrament of reconciliation requires contrition, penance, and restitution, the conversation regarding reparatory justice belong in the Catholic square. However, like you, I believe it is a conversation that needs to be done carefully and prayerfully, so that we do not fall into the trap of turning a genuine quest for justice into "just us". There is a difference.

At the end of every liturgical year, we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. I believe this feast day comes at a good time because I believe it helps us in this conversation, difficult as it is. What is this feast day saying? The Solemnity of Christ the King says that every liturgical celebration we had from last Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, all the Sundays of Ordinary Time, and all the special feast days and memorials along the way point to one truth: Jesus Christ is our Lord, he is our God, and he is the King of the Universe. He is everything we

say about him in the Creed. Jesus is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

What does this objectively mean though for people of faith? For one, it means: if we think Jesus was just one great person among many, we would be wrong. If we think Jesus was a great philosopher among many, we would be wrong. If we think Christianity is just one nice belief among many, the bible says we are wrong. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega and every letter in between. All fullness resides in Christ. Jesus Christ is King of the Universe.

And so, what does this king look like you might ask? Let's meditate on the cross for a moment. There he is. If I may riff off of Bishop Barron for a second, this king looks like a man around thirty, wouldn't you say? He is bloodied and abused, dying a humiliating and painful death on an instrument of torture. That is your king. Let that sink in. Why would a king do that, let alone God?

St. Paul tells us why in our second reading from Corinthians. St. Paul says, "For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life". What does that mean? For Saint Paul, Jesus gave his life for the reparation of our sins. There is that word again. Only Jesus could offer that perfect sacrifice for us for he himself was without sin. Just as death entered the world from the fruit of a tree in the Garden of Eden, salvation comes to us from the fruit of that tree (the cross). Yes, the cross is the tree of life that stands in contrast to the tree in the garden of Eden. In the Garden of Eden, the fruit of the forbidden tree was something to be grasped, selfishly at that. The fruit of the tree of life is the Eucharist we celebrate, the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ freely given to us as food and drink. The fruit of the Tree of Life you see is given, not grasped. It is why we also call this liturgy the sacrifice of the mass. We do not have the power to sacrifice for ourselves because we cannot save ourselves. In the Mass, Jesus is sacrificing himself for us as the perfect offering for the reparation of our sins and for the salvation of our souls.

My friends, Jesus is a very atypical king. Kings grasp and take whatever they want, whenever they want. For Jesus, kingship is about self-emptying, giving instead of taking. I think by extension, you and I should think of ourselves as atypical citizens as well because, for one, we are Jesus' disciples. Second, there will also be an accounting at the end of our lives as we see so clearly in our Gospel reading. Those who give food to the hungry, drink for the thirsty, those who welcome strangers, those who clothe the naked, those who care for the sick, and even the imprisoned, in short, the "givers" of our world, will be welcomed into paradise. Those who don't give food to the hungry, drink for the thirsty, who don't welcome strangers, clothe the naked, or care for the sick or the incarcerated, in short, the "takers" of our world, they will not be welcomed into paradise if we take this parable at face value.

For me, it makes theological sense. If the Holy Trinity can be described as the Father eternally forgetting himself out of love for the Son, and the Son as eternally forgetting himself in love of the Father, and the Holy Spirit as the love spirating forth from the Father and Son, and if can think of the afterlife as simply one reality of being eternally present with God, it is going to

be heaven for the “givers” of our world because their souls are in harmony with God. It is going to be miserable for the “takers” because they aren’t.

I think this is why, in Magnifica Humanitas, Pope Leo warns against a society that falls into the error of the City of Babel and a citizenry of consumeristic takers. He instead encourages us to embrace the way of Nehemiah, whose rebuilding of Jerusalem was marked by solidarity, a focus on the common good, and mutual self-giving. I hope you will all agree with me, any conversation surrounding healing our culture from the sin of racism belongs in Nehemiah’s City, not Babel’s.

Like I said at the beginning, I believe in having the conversation about reparations. Just like in the sacrament of reconciliation, there needs to be contrition, penance, and restitution, the conversation about reparatory justice do belong in the Catholic square. I am again grateful to the BCAC and our Office of Multicultural Ministry for organizing this. I am also grateful to Seattle University for hosting us. As we near the end of the conference, I invite us to continue to reflect on what Jesus wants for us, for our country, and for our Church, but even more so, what would Jesus do in light of his passion, death and resurrection? I mention that because sometimes our answers to what Jesus wants and what would Jesus do are in harmony with each other, sometimes they aren’t. After everything we have discussed and contemplated this weekend, on this feast day of Christ the King, let’s prayerfully reflect on what does Jesus want? What would Jesus do? What am I therefore called to do? And then, what is one thing we can do as atypical citizens of such an atypical and altruistic king? I invite us to ask ourselves these questions because, when it comes to social justice, in my experience, talk is cheap. Like we see so clearly in our Gospel reading, at the end of the day, what we do matters. Actions speak louder than words.