

8th Sunday in OT 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have often heard from people that the Church shouldn't get into politics, and I agree with that. In fact, did you know that by canon law a priest or a bishop is not to hold public office. Canon 285.3 states that clerics are forbidden to hold public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power.¹

That does not mean, however, that the Church should refrain from talking about political things. It is important for us to remember that our faith and or morality must inform our political views and choices. We cannot just have politics here as one thing, separate, and have our faith as a separate thing, with no overlap. I say all of this to correct that mistaken notion that the Church should not speak about things related to politics. With that clarification in place, let's relate our Gospel today to current events.

Our Gospel today seems to me to be very timely in light of current political events. Today, in our Gospel, our Lord speaks about blind guides, planks in eyes, and fruit. I think in order to understand these parables and similes we need to recognize that it is about the fruit. It is all about the fruit. So what do I mean by fruit? Well, the first definition of fruit is, of course, some fleshy product of a tree or other plant that contains seeds that can be eaten as food. But it can also be thought of as offspring, or even a logical outcome. We pray for instance, in the Hail Mary prayer, about Jesus, the fruit of Mary's womb. And what is this fruit? Obviously, it is a human being, because human children are the offspring of other human beings. Of course, Our Lord unique, in the fact, that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Blessed Virgin Mary so that she would conceive. So our Lord is also the fruit of God, the Only Begotten Son of God.

The fruit of an apple tree is an apple. The fruit of an oak tree is an acorn. These things come forth logically based on the source. We don't get apples from pear trees, and we don't get acorns from apple trees; and we don't get frogs or toads as the offspring of human beings; or in the example our Lord gives us, "people do not pick figs from thorn bushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles" (Lk 6:44).

These things are obvious and our Lord uses such examples. So when the blind lead the blind, the logical outcome is that they fall into a pit. When a person becomes the disciple of someone who is untrained or lacks knowledge, the logical outcome is ignorance. When a person who has a plank sticking out of their eye tries to remove the splinter from someone else's eye, the logical outcome is failure. A rotten tree bears rotten fruit, and a good tree bears good fruit; these are the logical outcomes. You see, our Lord wants us to use our human reason in concert with our faith.

¹ Check out this article to explain it: <http://canonlawmadeeasy.com/2012/09/20/can-priests-hold-public-office-2/>

Our Lord is making an important point here. Jesus is getting to the interior. St. Bede explains that for the man, it is his heart, for the tree, it is its roots; the treasure is contained there in the interior and from that store, if it is good, it produces good fruit, but if it is bad, it produces bad fruit.

The first chapter of the letter to James applies very well here verses 13-15, speaking of the fruit of sin:

St. James writes:

No one experiencing temptation should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death.

This is manifested in our modern times so well in the recent vote in New York. The New York senate recently passed a law that legalizes abortion right up to the moment of birth on the 22nd of January of this year. In addition, it offers no protection for a child that is born alive through a botched abortion. When I saw video of the New York senate applauding at the passing of the bill, I was almost sick to my stomach. Have you ever had the sense, when you watch something and you think to yourself, "That can't be real!" I remember that feeling on September 11th, 2001 when I watched video of planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers in New York. My heart sank into my stomach, and my mind watching the video didn't want to believe it. It wanted to think, "No, this is just some kind of made up movie footage or something." But it was real. I had a similar experience when as I watched video of that other recent tragedy in New York, when the State Senate stood up and applauded for passing a law that expanded the destruction of the most innocent up to the point of birth. My heart sank ... "Can this be real?"

The bishop of the Diocese of Syracuse wrote a pastoral letter in which he reminded the faithful under his care that no formal statement of excommunication is needed ... that those involved in the passage of that recent legislation have in fact separated themselves from communion with Christ and His Church. He encouraged them to repentance.

"A tree is revealed by its fruit," Our Blessed Lord tells us. And again St. James: "Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death."

I have picked on New York, but it is everywhere. On February 25th of this year, the 116th United States congress blocked bill S.311, known as the "Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection act." This bill would have insured that if an attempted abortion results in the live birth of an infant that a health care worker needs to provide healthcare for the infant ... that this infant would have protection under the law. It would have also required mandatory reporting of violations as well. I've read the bill it is very reasonable,

and it was blocked by congress. This should have been a slam dunk; it should have been passed without hesitation.

Now, why am I speaking of these things. You might think to yourself, “These things are outside of my control. We have no connection to the Senate in New York. We have no control over what the 116th congress does. How does anything you are talking about relate to me?” Well, our own Senator Ron Wyden was one of the forty-four senators who blocked the “Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection act.” Did you know that in Oregon abortion is legal through all nine months of pregnancy. We have no laws whatsoever protecting women and babies from abortion. In August of 2017, our Gov. Kate Brown signed into law the Reproductive Health Equity Act, which requires health insurers to provide birth control and abortion without charging a co-pay, and dedicates funds to provide so-called “reproductive health care to noncitizens.” Planned Parenthood, the number one abortion provider, is going into our schools and providing sex education classes to our children.

All of this, shows that these things I am talking about are right here in our own home. I mention all of these things to emphasize that our faith and our morality is above politics; it is a higher good than politics and it must inform our politics. Our identity as Christian supersedes that of democrats or republican. Our faith must inform every aspect of our lives. We cannot compartmentalize our lives, separating those different compartments from our faith. Our faith must inform our politics; it must inform the way that we vote; it must inform the way that we behave at school or at work. It must inform my family life. It must inform my relationships. It must inform what you do behind closed doors.

What is the fruit of this modern mentality? Here is the logical outcome: the determination of you worth is whether you are wanted or not. The determination of the value of baby is if he or she is wanted. The determination of the value of the elderly is if they are wanted, and not just wanted but wanted by the right people.

But here is the Good News in all of this. Your worth, your value does not depend on whether the right person wants you. But nonetheless, I say to you, that you are wanted, and you are loved. Our Good and Gracious God, has loved you into existence.

Ok, so I need to make sure that I address any of you who have been affected by or involved in abortion. You need to know that God loves you, and no sin, no matter how great, removes from us the possibly of God’s forgiveness. God’s forgiveness is there waiting for you. If you are struggling with the trauma and after-effects of an abortion please know that there are resources available to you for your continued healing. For many years, I have been involved in the Rachel’s Vineyard retreat ministry which helps post-abortive men and woman to greater healing, I have seen great fruit come forth from this ministry.

I must speak the truth to you my brothers and sisters, because where else are you going to hear it? The media? Our politicians? Hollywood? We are surrounded by blind

guides who are leading us into a pit. We are surrounded by ignorant teachers. People with planks sticking out of their eyes are offering remove the slivers from your eyes. Actually, it is worse than blind guides accidentally falling into a pit. These blind guides are grasping us by the hand and saying, "Let's jump in together!" Too often, rotten fruit is being offered to us. This rotten fruit is decorated and painted and packaged on the outside, but it is filled with corruption and death. We must be wary of semantics and word games. This rotten fruit is wrapped up in a nice package called "choice;" It is tied with a pretty bow called "women's reproduction health," when inside it is filled with corruption and death.

And again St. James' words are so relevant: "Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death."

Our Lord is inviting us to clothe ourselves with incorruptibility and immortality, as St. Paul says in our 2nd reading today.² Immediately following today's Gospel reading our Lord says, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' but not do what I command? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the floor came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built." (Luke 6: 46-48).

My dear brothers and sisters, Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Rock upon which we build our house, and he has founded his Church built upon the Rock of Peter in order to preserve what is true and good and beautiful. Despite the attacks on the Church from without and from within, Our Church stands bulwark against the insanity of the world. We need to remain strengthened and fortified with in the Church's loving embrace. We must fortify ourselves through our prayer and reception of the sacraments. We must fortify ourselves through our continued study of the Scriptures, our Tradition, and the Teachings of the Magisterium of the Church. We must fortify ourselves by living lives in conformity with Christ's commandments, his Law of Love. These are our clear-sighted guides. These are the pristine, life-giving, nourishing fruits. It is here that we find our hope and sanity, in a chaotic and insane world whose foundation is shifting sands.

At the end of Mass, Marybeth Schombert, our Parish's Pastoral Associate, is going to give us some suggestions on how we might go deeper. Please listen attentively to what she proposes.

I don't think that I can conclude any better than echoing St. Paul's words in our second reading today:

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters,
be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord,
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

² 1 Cor: 15:54-58