

Be Not Afraid

Bishop John M. LeVoir's Monthly Column

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CHRISTMAS

Ever since the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, life on earth has been a mixture of good and evil. Life has been a combination of suffering and pain, and of happiness and joy. A cursory examination of history makes one acutely aware of these things. But, how are we to make sense of all of this?

Some people try to figure it out on their own, or seek the explanation of friends. Others seek wise scholars and teachers, past and present. Others look to celebrities, the movies, and media personalities. Still others take their wisdom from politicians and public figures.

But, when is all said and done, all of these seem to be lacking in one way or another. The final result is usually confusion and division. We have seen these things in our recent political elections.

God understands us and our confusion, and he gives us the solution to our dilemmas. What is God's answer to the confusing question that seems to describe so well our life on this earth after sin? God the Father's answer is a Person: Jesus Christ. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4).

It is the birth of the Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, that we celebrate on Christmas. On the first Christmas, God the Son, sent by the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, was born into our world to share in our joys and sorrows. He comes to bring us good and to conquer evil.

"Each person needs to have 'adequate responses' to their deepest existential questions." Since "Jesus knows the heart of man like no other, he is able to heal and to give life and consolation to humanity" (Pope Francis, Angelus address, June 19, 2016).

As Jesus himself told us: "I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33). Let the peace of Christ fill our hearts this Christmas with his healing, life, and consolation.

World Day of Peace

In his Message for the 50th World Day of Peace, to be celebrated on Jan. 1, 2017, Pope Francis will urge families, faith communities, government leaders, and the international community to practice non-violence and work to build a just peace.

In our country, as well as countries throughout the world, the solution to disputes seems to be death rather than dialogue. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops encourages us to pray for peace, to learn about the Church's teaching on peace (the Catechism of the Catholic Church is a good place to begin), and to act for peace.

Immigration Sunday

Immigration Sunday Minnesota is on Jan. 8, 2017, the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord. Immigration Sunday, celebrated in Minnesota since 2009, is an important moment for Minnesota Catholics to address the realities of immigration through prayer, education, and action.

This year, the theme is Building Communities of Encounter – communities that listen to one another with the ear of the heart, acknowledging challenges and differences but seeking to live together in friendship that recognizes the inalienable dignity of each human person.

Authentic, loving encounter is urgently needed in a deeply divided nation. It is especially needed in the way we discuss and approach our immigrant brothers and sisters, who are too often spoken of in dehumanizing language and for whom the results of the recent elections bring much fear and uncertainty.

As the bishops of Minnesota wrote in their 2012 statement on immigration, “Unlocking the Gate in Our Heart,” our nation has the duty to regulate our borders for the common good, ensuring the safety of our people and the integrity of our values.

But in doing so, we must also treat migrant men, women, and children as Christ among us, offering them love, compassion, and hospitality. These twin pillars of the Church’s teaching on immigration must never be set in opposition to one another.

Let us take this year’s Immigration Sunday as an opportunity to grow in faith by reaching out to the strangers in our midst and by forming stronger bonds of solidarity in our communities.

Catholics at the Capitol

The Minnesota Catholic Conference, which supports the ministry of the Minnesota Catholic bishops, invites all of us to the St. Paul RiverCentre and the Minnesota State Capitol on March 9, 2017 for Catholics at the Capitol.

We are invited to join more than 1,000 Catholics from across Minnesota for a day of inspiration and advocacy at our State Capitol. It will be a day to listen to Church leaders and speakers such as Bishop James Conley, the bishop of the Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., and Gloria Purvis Scott, of EWTN and Black Catholics United for Life.

The Minnesota bishops will all be present and will accompany those attending. There will be an opportunity to pray with the bishops in the State Capitol rotunda. There will also be an opportunity to learn about the key issues facing our state, receive training from experts on effective advocacy, and see the potential of a united Catholic voice in Minnesota.

Finally, we will be able to lobby Minnesota lawmakers with the bishops, connect with other committed Catholics, and most importantly, to live out our baptismal call to faithful citizenship. Please join us on March 9 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the RiverCentre and the State Capitol in St. Paul. For more information, go to www.catholicsatthcapitol.org.

Two great Marian feasts

December is a month that contains two great feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dec. 8 and Dec. 12. Dec. 8 is the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and Dec. 12 is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of the United States. Under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mary is the patroness of the Americas and is especially honored by our Hispanic brothers and sisters.

There is no better way to honor the Blessed Virgin than to attend Mass and to pray for the people of the Americas, who need our prayers desperately. Please check your local parish for Mass times.