Tr.16(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." [Eph. III:14]*

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 There has been a lot of emotion spent in recent years over the bowing of one's knee. It started with NFL football with the National Anthem and spread to the halls of Congress and into the streets. For myself, your pastor never has quite understood the commotion.

 The bending of one's knee, or "genuflecting" which in Latin literally means "knee-bend", is a sign of reverence. We do it in church when we enter or leave our pew. We do it if we are knighted by the King; clergy do it to kiss to the ring of their bishop.

 In your pastor’s family room we have a framed poster from the Illinois Centennial of 1918. The caption reads: “not without thy wondrous story can be writ the nation's glory, Illinois.” In it a pioneer with rifle, powder-horn, and coonskin cap is **genuflecting** while holding the American flag about to kiss it.

 We grew up in an age where we learned respect for the flag. We learned that the 13 stripes represent the thirteen original colonies. We learned that the red represented the blood of the patriots and their **courage**; we learned that the blue field represented **justice** and perseverance, and that the white represented **purity** and innocence. We learned to put our hands over our hearts and that, men anyway, take off caps for the national anthem, Pledge, or when the flag passed us in parade. In the U.S. Flag Code one learns that the flag actually is to be regarded as a **living** symbol.

 Thus, to me anyway, bending one’s knee before something which represents the Christian virtues of **courage**, **justice,** and **purity** in America is not a problem. No doubt the English share this feeling when they stand upon the monarch's arrival in any room or when they sing "God Save the King". It is not unlike giving a small bow when passing before a crucifix.

 Bending one’s knee before such is decorous. The Holy angels could destroy the earth in a second, yet they themselves ever bow before the Lord of heaven, as they each go about their spiritual work.

 On the feast of the archangel Michael and All Angels the collect reads: "O Everlasting God...mercifully grant that, as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so, by thy appointment, they may succor and defend us on earth***.***" Just as we seek and hope for defense from trouble by the Holy angels, the Church needs defense from trouble too.

The Church suffers from enemies within and without. Those "without" can be other religions or the antithesis of religion (the antimatter) of atheism or her first cousin: agnosticism. (Our Woke today most likely draw from both.) Obviously not all, but many of those who fight for "freedom **from** religion" seemingly seek to put the Church into a box.

 Such folk then will only run into "church" if they seek it out, maybe for a Christmas concert or wedding. Other than that being free from religion means never having **her** cross any of your senses in any manner at any time of the day or night, anywhere, ever.

 We live in a land which Constitutionally protects freedom of religion **and** the exercising of such beliefs in our daily life where many millions are believers if not all be Christian. Yet, many politicians today feel the need to proclaim that while **they** are morally opposed to "X", they don't want to legislate their morality. The silliness of abandoning at work what motivates us otherwise is laid bare by contemplating someone running for governor or President proclaiming that the calamity of global warming is of grave concern to him, but he won't legislate his values if elected.

 Despite our Constitutional freedom of religion, government often can be a challenge to practicing ones faith, as we all have witnessed firsthand in with the recent pandemic. At one time in San Francisco only one person at a time was allowed inside **any** size church for prayer and no more than 50 could attend any outdoor liturgy. Thus, a priest could have an acolyte up at the high altar to assist.

 Beyond external threats the Church also suffers from enemies within. The source of these of course would be fellow humans who cause suffering. Sometimes it comes from the top as with the clergy sex scandal, which only most dramatically played out in the Catholic church. Or it can be at the top with bishops leading folks into, as opposed to driving them away from, heresy or just a pastor who misspeaks or misunderstands some theology.

 Yet, the laity also can create headaches for the Church as well. Sometimes the problems involve heretical ideas *discovered* on their own or through the writings of a book. Often though problems can flow from all too human failings, such as pride or jealousy. These can lead to interpersonal problems: "Someone insulted me there so I'm never going back!", or “you, Father, have your back turned on me!”, etc. [In case this ever comes up…., two quick responses exist without going into theology: “the priest is leading the congregation in prayer, without distraction from **phones**” and “boy, you are lucky you don’t have to look at him!!”]

 To handle all these problems before the Church, and more, she needs the help of the Holy Spirit. The Church needs to be cleansed of dirt and disease accumulated within this ill world which can sicken and weaken it from within. But it also needs to be protected from those outside who intentionally or, blinded by faulty reasoning, unintentionally war against it.

 The Church in fact **is** involved in a war. And it is a war by the forces of darkness assembled and applied against her by "spiritual principalities", as St. Paul puts it. Her situation will not improve by denying that a war is going on anymore than denying that Russia attacked Ukraine will make people in America safer.

 And so, we pray. We pray that the Lord through the Holy Spirit will continually “cleanse and protect the Church", the body of Christ. The PB has several other prayers for the Church, including the classic "Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church" during the Eucharist.

 Last Sunday's collect was quite similar to today's: "KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy... from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation." Both prayers are wonderful in fighting accommodation with a world where Satan rules.

 Accommodation, like appeasement, only buys time, not reinforcements. Not to pick on my childhood Episcopal church, but has its accommodation to the world's zeitgeist over the last fifty years helped it escape or lessen her own turmoil? Has it helped the Methodist church? The Lutheran? Even the Roman? More accommodation seems always needed.

 Beyond prayer for the Church we can do two more things. We can work to improve our own backyard. We can work to make ourselves and our families as clean and holy however possible.

 Beyond that we need to expect confrontation since the world is very much at war with us. If "the dogma is strong in you", one should expect travail. But, as St. Paul probablywould advise, as he often wrote, we should "faint not" at our "tribulations" which are actually our "glory". For the Lord is with His body here on earth and will "keep us ever... from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation." Amen. +