

4th Sunday in Lent, Cycle B March 22, 2009

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

Adding Infidelity to Infidelity

When I went to Washington, DC, a couple of months ago for the March for Life, one particular banner caught my eye. The banner had a quote from the philosopher Plato that stated: *“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”* This quote speaks to the heart of much of the problems in our country and in the world. It reminds us of all the evil that exists because our leaders, intelligent men and women, do not want to face the light of the truth. They are afraid of the truth because it might interfere with their plans and lifestyle, and their chance to get reelected. If they understood the truth, they could no longer rationalize the immoral behavior that they promote for our society.

The quote from Plato reminded me of the gospel passage we heard this morning. Jesus is the Light, and St. John tells us: *“And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.”*

We need to ask ourselves if we are becoming a nation living in darkness as the culture of death seems to be taking a stronger hold week by week and day by day. We have leaders in our country, many of them Catholics, who operate in the dark and deception to enact new laws to promote evil and to strike down old laws that tried to prevent it. They hide legislation in the stimulus package to reward Planned Parenthood by promoting contraception and by changing health care rules to make abortion more easily accessible.

Last November, the citizens of our state passed a constitutional amendment eliminating all restrictions on embryonic stem cell research. This was done by deception and deceit that caused intentional confusion about the differences between embryonic and adult stem cells and the differences between their morality and effectiveness. The powers of darkness seemed to succeed that day. Since his inauguration, President Obama has repealed the Mexico City Policy which had restricted taxpayer funding for groups providing or promoting abortions overseas. He has lifted the ban on federal funding of embryonic stem cell research on new stem cell lines that will require killing additional embryos, additional human lives. Just a few days ago, he changed the United States policy at the United Nations, and our country now supports a statement that calls for the decriminalization of homosexuality and calls for criminal penalties for those who criticize homosexuality. And I wonder when I may go to jail.

And we have already talked about President Obama’s willingness to sign the Freedom of Choice Act, or FOCA, which would remove all restrictions currently in effect on abortions, including eliminating parental notification and reinstating the legality of partial birth abortion. The Bishops’ post card campaign, which we have participated in, was a preemptory strike to nip the legislation in the bud before it even gets reintroduced. But even if FOCA doesn’t resurface in its original form, the forces of darkness threaten to

sneak pieces of the legislation through by attaching amendments and riders onto other important legislation. We need to be vigilant and make sure the light shines clearly on the actions of our president and our legislators.

The FOCA fight continues, but now we have a new fight being organized by the Bishops. On February 27, the Obama Administration placed on a federal website the news that it intends to remove a conscience protection rule for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The conscience protection rule was put in place by President Bush last December to offer protection to health care workers – doctors and nurses - who have a conscientious objection with being involved with abortion. It implements and enforces three federal laws protecting the conscience rights of health care providers, especially those at risk of being discriminated against because of their moral or religious objection to abortion. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is currently inviting public comment on this proposal to rescind Bush’s regulation, and our bishops are encouraging us to make our comments known. This must be done by April 9. If you have internet access, I urge you to visit the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ website and follow the links to electronically send your comments to Health and Human Services. (<http://www.usccb.org/conscienceprotection/>) Make sure doctors and nurses have the freedom of choice.

Jesus is the Light, and He is our Savior. Draw near to Him in faith and follow His commands. We do not follow His commandments and teachings to earn our salvation; only He could do this for us. We hear this from St. Paul in our second reading: ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.”*** By grace we have been saved through faith; it is not from our works. But can we, individually and as a nation, lose God’s grace because of our actions?

We can look at our first reading from the second book of Chronicles to see how God punished the people because they ***“added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations.”*** God sent messengers to them, the prophets, so that they would see the light, but they refused the light and preferred the dark. Chronicles states: ***“But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets, until the anger of the LORD against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy.”*** And ***“those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon.”*** We have some notable Catholic politicians who have scoffed at and mocked our pope and our bishops.

We see how our nation adds ***“infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations.”*** And we need to be politically active to let God’s light shine on our leaders and fellow citizens. We need to pray for conversions. But first, especially in this Lenten season, we need to examine our own personal lives. We have to make sure that we are not mocking God’s messengers and the Church’s teachings. We have to make sure we are not trying to live in the dark to make our lives more convenient and comfortable and easy.

Do you support the pro-choice politicians that operate in the dark? Do you support embryonic stem cell research and refuse to see the light of the Church’s teaching because you want to pursue cures, even if they are obtained by means against God’s will? Do you practice contraception, watch pornography, or practice other sexual sin in the darkness of your own homes because no one will know? God knows.

We are halfway through Lent. Tomorrow night we will have a communal penance service here at Sacred Heart, and I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity. Come and examine your conscience. Reflect honestly on whether you are, in some ways, living in the darkness. Do not be afraid of the Light. Come receive His forgiveness, mercy, and graces. Remember, by your actions you cannot win your salvation, but by your actions, you can lose it if you do not repent and ask for forgiveness.

Deacon Joe Hulway