As storm brews, San Fran archbishop fires back at school guideline critics

Kevin J. Jones
SAN FRANCISCO, CA (CNA/EWTN News). Politicians have targeted San Francisco Catholic schools’ teacher standards, but Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone says they are a matter of Catholic mission and common sense.

“Would you hire a campaign manager who advocates policies contrary to those that you stand for, and who shows disrespect toward you and the Democratic Party in general?” he wrote in his reply to eight state legislators who had criticized Catholic standards for school employees.

The archbishop suggested a hypothetical situation in which Democratic politicians employ a “brilliant campaign manager,” though a Republican, who is willing to work for them and not speak or act contrary to his employers or his employers’ political party.

“Now let’s say that this campaign manager you hired, despite promises to the contrary, starts speaking critically of your party and favorably of your running opponent, and so you decide to fire the person,” the archbishop continued in a Feb. 19 letter. He suggested this firing would be done not for hatred of Republicans but because the employee “violated the trust given to you and acted contrary to your mission.”

The Archdiocese of San Francisco on Feb. 3 announced additions and clarifications to the faculty and staff handbooks for the archdiocese’s four high schools, as well as proposed new morals clauses.

Saving living history

Margaret Gabriel
EAST BERNSTADT, Highway 25, near East Bernstadt in Laurel County, curves gently through farmland, passing a few businesses and some modest homes. The road curves to the left and reveals St. Sylvester Oratory atop a small hill. The small church was constructed in 1887 by descendants of people who still claim the small church as the center point of their faith community. St. Sylvester is a part of St. William Church in nearby London. Behind the small, white clapboard structure is a cemetery that has served as the final resting place for parishioners since the 19th Century and is still part of the ministry of the church in this part of Laurel County. Only the sound of an occasional passing car disturbs the serenity.

The oratory comes to life with the arrival of Tracy House, Carolyn Wootten, Joette Williams, Betty Blunschi and Kelly Blunschi Hixon, all of whom are related by blood, marriage or affection to the people who constructed St. Sylvester. The group has gathered to talk about the activities they are planning, in order to raise the money needed to make repairs on the oratory. The Diocese of Lexington estimates the cost at a little over $100,000.

St. Sylvester Oratory is one of 24 churches that were established by Father Paul Joseph Volk (1841-1919), who was born in Germany, but after his ordination in 1865, felt called to the mission areas of the United States in the Diocese of Louisville. Fr. Volk traveled widely in Kentucky, ministering to German-speaking immigrants in the rural parts of the Louisville archdiocese which included all of Kentucky at that time. When Father Volk learned that dozens of Catholic Swiss and German immigrants had settled in Laurel County, he purchased two acres of land in East Bernstadt, where a church was constructed by Anton and John Blunschi, Italian immigrants who had come to America to work in the mines.

The first Mass was celebrated in the small church in East Bernstadt in 1888 and was dedicated and named St. Sylvester by Bishop Camillus P. Maes on July 3, 1894.

In those early days, priests came to St. Sylvester from Jellico, TN, until, in 1899, Laurel County became a mission territory of the Benedictine Fathers of Cullman, AL. In 1957, St. Sylvester and St. Andrew Church in London (later, St. William) were taken into the pastoral care of the Diocese of Covington, then became part of the Diocese of Lexington, when it was established in 1988.

Because of the dwindling number of Catholics in East Bernstadt, St. Sylvester was declared an oratory on July 1, 2002. An oratory

Lent * 2015

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Cordileone

Continued from Page 1

for teacher contracts that would define teachers as having a ministerial role. The archdiocese said the changes to the handbook and contract do not contain anything new but are intended to “clarify existing expectations that Catholic teachers in their professional and public lives uphold Catholic teaching.”

The changes focus on sexual morality and religious practice due to prevalent confusion about the church’s stance, Archbishop Cordileone said in early February.

But political protests and threats—not confusion—greeted the changes.

“What is happening is a direct challenge to the teaching authority of the church and its right to teach its doctrine by public authorities in direct conflict with the First Amendment,” Bill May, president of the California-based Catholics for the Common Good, told CNA Feb. 19.

Eight California state legislators, in a Feb. 17 letter to Archbishop Cordileone, called on him to withdraw the morality clauses. Although they acknowledged he has “discretion over working conditions” at the schools, they claimed the standard for high school staff and faculty “infringes on the personal freedoms of their employees” and “sends an alarming message of intolerance to youth.”

The legislators claimed the standards “conflict with settled areas of law” and “foist a discriminatory environment” in the community. They suggested that religious freedom exemptions in federal law are being used as “a tool for discrimination.”

Archbishop Cordileone’s response stressed the need for accurate and complete information. He said there was “a lot of misinformation” being circulated about the contract. It was a falsehood to say the morality clauses apply to teachers’ private lives, he added.

He said he would respect politicians who employ or do not employ “whomever you wish to advance your mission.”

“I simply ask the same respect from you.”

But political power, not respect, could be on full display soon.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports that California Assemblyman Phil Ting of San Francisco, one of the legislators who signed the letter, said in an e-mail that “any novel legal maneuvers to impose injustice must be stopped.”

San Francisco Supervisor Mark Farrell told the Chronicle that city officials are looking into legal options to prevent what he consid-

ers to be discriminatory employment practices. Farrell said he planned to introduce a Board of Supervisors resolution that will “express the concern and disappointment” of Catholics opposed to the standards.

May rejected the threats of political action against the church.

Locally, several hundred people, including some Catholic high school teachers, students, and students’ parents, gathered outside San Francisco’s St. Mary’s Cathedral on Ash Wednesday to protest.

One student protestor told CBS affiliate KPIX 5 that the archbishop’s actions are in line with Catholic teaching, but worried that if the standards are applied, “a lot of our teachers might leave.”

“We don’t want our teachers to leave and maybe even the faith,” the student said. “We just think that maybe the Catholic Church should become as progressive as the Episcopal Church.”

Some teachers critical of the changes do not object to the morality clauses specifically, but object to being considered as “min-

isters,” worrying it will undermine their collective bargaining power as part of the teacher’s union.

San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors has previously opposed Catholic teaching.

In 2006, the board condemned a Vatican instruction telling the archdiocese’s Catholic Charities affiliate to stop placing adoptive children with same-sex couples. The resolution referred to the Vatican as a “foreign country” that interferes in San Francisco affairs and claimed the church’s teaching on homosexuality is “hateful” and “insulting to all San Franciscans.”

The Archdiocese of San Francisco challenged the resolution as an unconstitutional use of government power against religion, but the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the challenge in 2011.


“Unlike politicians, the church does not set it standards based on popular opinion,” he said. “She would be a fraud if she did.”

He contended that the legislators’ letter is “an arrogant attempt by politicians to challenge the authority of the archbishop to set standards on who is authorized to teach Catholic doctrine to children.”

He defended the standards, saying it is reasonable for parents who send their children to Catholic high schools to be sure that their children will learn “authentic Catholic teaching, without conflicting commentary or examples by people in authority.”

The handbook additions state that individual teachers are not required to believe each stated item of Catholic doctrine. San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone said this recognizes that some Catholic teachers and non-Catholic teachers might not agree with everything the church teaches.

Objectors have particularly focused on expectations that teachers not undermine sexual morality in their personal behavior or engage in public advocacy of positions contrary to Catholicism, such as support for abortion or “gay marriage.”

Opposition to the archdiocese’s actions has some popularity in a city known for left-leaning political activism and permissive, even celebratory attitudes towards sexual vice.

LGBT activist groups such as the Human Rights Campaign have rallied national opposition and fanned hostile media coverage of the archdiocese.

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For Coptic Christians, the threat of martyrdom is part of daily life

Matt Hadro
WASHINGTON, DC (CNA/EWTN News). The brutal murder of 21 Coptic Christians in Libya at the hands of ISIS last week is shining a light on the reality faced by many of Egypt’s Christians on a daily basis.

“These 21 victims, they were not the first and they will not be the last. There is a flowing river of Christian blood in the Middle East,” said Mina Abdelmalak, one of the organizers of a D.C. candlelight prayer vigil outside the White House on Ash Wednesday.

The prayer vigil commemorated the 21 Coptic Christians beheaded last week by the Islamist terror group ISIS. The Christians had been working in Libya to support their families back home. They were abducted by ISIS in December and January.

In an internet video published by the extremist group, the Copts were marched along the Libyan coast and then murdered, with the video title “A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross.”

The video caught the attention of the world, garnering significant media attention and responses from world leaders.

While this act of martyrdom was heroic and newsworthy, several Coptic priests stressed that for many Christians in Egypt, the threat of death for the faith is a daily reality that goes unnoticed by the rest of the world.

“Most people living in those areas, really every day they live by the grace of God,” explained Fr. Anthony Messeh of the St. Timothy and St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Church in Arlington, VA.

“They’re not as shaken by these things as we are, because they count every day as a gift from God.” Their public faith could mean “the end of their life,” he told CNA.

One local Coptic Orthodox priest in attendance at the Washington, D.C., prayer vigil voiced both fear and hope in response to the Libya massacre.

“We are afraid about the spreading of the devil all over the world,” said Fr. Damiadious Rizk of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Va. “The only thing can face this devil is Christ himself.”

“We believe that the Lord will overcome this darkness and spread it away,” he said. Rural Egypt, where many of the Christians hailed from, is no friend of Christianity, Fr. Messeh said. While he has not lived in Egypt, he conveyed the situation there from accounts of those who had.

The plight of the Copts was “very bad” under the rule of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, he said.

Now, the situation has “officially” improved with the new president, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, who has said and done the right things. However, many Christians are still persecuted, especially in the rural areas where they are very much a minority.

Turn to Martyrdom, Page 8
St. Sylvester

Continued from Page 1

is a structure other than a parish church that has been set aside for prayer and the celebration of Mass. Mass is celebrated at St. Sylvester four times a year; the pinnacle of the year is the celebration on All Souls’ Day. Although Mass is celebrated only four or five times a year at St. Sylvester, the oratory is the only church established by Fr. Volk that is still active.

“Everyone who comes tells you about the special spirit of St. Sylvester,” said parishioner Tracy House.

The liturgy on All Souls Day is often standing room only in the small church. In addition to the Catholics of East Bernstadt (who are members of St. William Church in London), worshippers include people who have returned to St. Sylvester to memorialize family and friends buried in the church cemetery, which is still active. Like churches, Catholic cemeteries are consecrated ground. “Anyone who has lost a loved one is invited to the celebration,” said Father Pat Stewart, pastor of St. William in London, as well St. Ann, (the mission in Manchester), and St. Sylvester.

House heads the committee of St. Sylvester parishioners that is working to raise the money needed to make repairs. Several are descendants of the Blunschi brothers who constructed the church in 1888 and are buried in the cemetery behind the oratory. The project will start with the removal of the stained glass windows, so the building can be jacked up. “The building needs a new foundation,” said Fr. Stewart, as House demonstrated a distinct sloping to the floor of the church. “And there are other things that we can and should do.”

Fr. Stewart pointed out the need to make the building accessible. Although the back of the church features a long ramp that allows entrance without climbing the front stairs, its aging wood is beginning to decay. In addition to the new foundation, repairs will include a new ceiling and insulation, floor repair, new downspouts, and new electrical wiring.

Although House, Williams, Wooten, Hixson and Blunschi are active members of St. William in London, they are joined by the family ties of St. Sylvester, where they say they truly feel rooted in their faith through their ancestors. “We owe it to them and to this community to make this place beautiful,” said House. “We see it as a form of evangelization.”

Betty Blunschi, who joined the Catholic Church in 1957, said, “Catholics are in the minority here, but people have great respect for the church. We would be proud to have more weddings and services here.”

Several times each year, confirmation candidates tour the oratory to learn more about the history of the church in Eastern Kentucky and, specifically, Laurel County. Its contribution to the history of the church in Laurel County, Kentucky, and the Diocese of Lexington is one more reason the committee feels responsible to preserve St. Sylvester.

The committee, with the help of diocesan workers, has applied for a grant to fund the needed repairs and parishioners have pledged funds, as well. A recent letter asking parishioners for assistance with the project says: “… please take the time to visit this 127-year-old Oratory, sitting on its hill looking out all over East Bernstadt. It offers a small chapel setting of humble spirit and tranquil peace. With restoration it can continue its blessing from the past and, just as important, continue to offer evangelism for the future.”

Fr. Stewart appears to take pride in the initiative of the parishioners he shepherds and is an important player in the renovation efforts. “I love historical places, and that’s one reason to take on the project, but I love it more because of the people here and the people out in the cemetery.”

If you would like to contribute to the restoration of this historic site in the Diocese of Lexington, make a check payable to St. William Church, with “St. Sylvester Restoration” written on the memo line. Mail donations to St. William Church, 521 West Fifth Street, London, KY 40741.
Bishops push for Congress to support conscience rights in health care act

WASHINGTON DC (CNA/EWTN News). Just because you may oppose abortion doesn’t mean you should be denied comprehensive health care coverage, according to Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore and Cardinal Sean O’Malley of Boston.

The two spoke last Friday, urging Congress to support the Health Care Conscience Rights Act in defense of conscientious objection.

“Government should not force anyone to stop offering or covering much-needed legitimate health care because they cannot in conscience participate in destroying a developing human life or violate their conscience in other ways,” Archbishop Lori and Cardinal O’Malley together wrote in a letter to Congress.

The bishops, who chair the Committee on Pro-Life Activities and the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged Congress to support conscience rights in health care legislation, dwelling on the importance of maintaining protected civil rights when it comes to the issue of moral objections in health care.

Archbishop Lori and Cardinal O’Malley referred specifically to a recently introduced mandate in California that incorporates all elective abortions – including late term – into the state’s health care policy, insisting that all health care plans within the state include this mandate.

Although this policy violates civil rights protected by federal law, California is leaving no room for moral objections and will enforce the legislation in religious universities, schools and churches. Other states, such as Washington, have also adapted this mandate.

On the other side of the fence, Reps. Diane Black, John Fleming, and Jeff Fortenberry have introduced the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (H.R. 940), which would protect individuals from purchasing health insurance when they have a moral or religious objection to what it covers.

This bill, which boasts bi-partisan support, would also incorporate a conscience clause into the Affordable Care Act, providing an option to deny the items in the health care plan which violate moral or religious values. The bishops believe Congress acting to support this bill is an obvious step in protecting basic civil rights of conscience.

Similar to the H.R. 940 bill is the Weldon amendment, which prevents the government from using received federal funds to discriminate against individuals who do not want to participate in health care that violates a religious belief.

This bill has been successfully approved in Congress for the past ten years, although it does not provide the right of private action. This is especially significant, because if the Weldon amendment merged with the H.R. 940 bill, it would also provide the right to go to court to individuals who reject health care coverage on moral grounds.

“We hope Congress will agree that people whose civil rights on this point are violated have a right to go to court,” the bishops noted.

In fact, President Obama has expressed support for the Weldon amendment, maintaining that on a federal level at least, individuals have a protected civil right to choose not to be involved in an abortion when it comes to health insurance.

The issue is likely to get more heated before it cools down, given that California believes the penalty of funding withdrawal in the Weldon amendment is subject to challenge. Even if the mandate violates federal law, it will have to receive the red light from Congress before dying down, which is why the bishops are pleading with Congress to take heed.

“We strongly urge you to support and co-sponsor the Health Care Conscience Rights Act,” the bishops continued, urging legislators to stand against the mandates that would deny health coverage to those with conscientious objections.

Seminarians receive ministries of acolyte, lector

ST. MEINRAD, IN. Lexington seminarians Brandon Bigam and Jeffrey Childers received the ministry of acolyte and James Harding received the ministry of lector on February 19 in the St. Meinrad Seminary’s St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel. Archbishop Joseph Tobin, of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, installed the acolytes and the lectors.

An acolyte assists a deacon or priest, primarily in the celebration of Mass. He attends to the needs of the altar and may distribute Communion as an auxiliary minister. He also may be entrusted with the public veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, but does not give the Benediction, since he is not a priest or deacon.

The ministry of lector is conferred upon those who prepare and proclaim readings from Scripture at Mass and other liturgical celebrations. A lector also may recite psalms between the readings and present the intentions for the general intercessions.

Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology offers initial and continuing education for priests, permanent deacons and lay ministers. A two-year pre-theology program leads to a Master of Arts in Catholic Philosophical Studies. The four-year theology program leads to a Master of Divinity degree.

Lay students can earn a Master of Catholic Philosophical Studies, a Master of Arts in theology or a Master of Arts in pastoral theology. The Permanent Deacon Formation Program offers academic, spiritual, and professional formation to permanent deacon candidates, in partnership with individual dioceses.
Mary Queen of the Holy Rosary School held their Open House on Sunday, January 25, 2015 for Catholic Schools Week. Parishioners and present school families were invited, as well as families who don’t presently send their kids to Mary Queen but are interested in learning more about the school. The PTO helps by providing cookies for the event and to talk with all the new families. Julia Denney, a First Grade assistant teacher (above) chats with a couple of parents. Pictured above right are Becky Brown, principal and Laura Soldato, development director. Photos provided

Above, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Altar Servers have recently started a monthly service project program. They kicked off the program by collecting food for the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry at SEAS in February. Photo provided

Left, the inscription for the new crypt for lives lost through miscarriage at Calvary Cemetery (see photo on Page 1), designed by Danny Wilkerson. It reads, “All life has inestimable value, even the weakest and most vulnerable...are masterpieces of God’s creation, made in His own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect.” CR photo: T.F. Shaughnessy

What’s going on in your parish?

Send us your photos & a brief description (who, what, when & where) and we’ll publish them in Cross Roads!
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February 22, 2015

The season of Lent is characterized by, among other things, giving up something. We may choose something that gives us pleasure or some destructive habit we know we need to break. The question, of course, is why are we giving up anything? To what end is our “sacrifice” directed? Perhaps most importantly, are we giving up the right thing?

**THY KINGDOM COME**

In the spiritual classic, “Trustful Surrender to Divine Providence,” St. Claude de la Colombiere writes:

“Christ promised on behalf of His Father that He would give us everything, even the very smallest things. But He laid down an order to be observed in all that we ask, and if we do not obey this rule we are unlikely to obtain anything. He tells us in St. Matthew: Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be given to you besides.”

The kingdom of God is a state of communion with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a state that Jesus, the Living Word of God, made present to his disciples during his earthly ministry. Each of the apostles was invited into a relationship of ever-deepening communion with Jesus, which reached its climax at Pentecost, when they received the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the “mind of Christ” had welled up inside the Apostles to the point where they no longer lived, but Christ through them. And we, too, are continually invited to enter into this relationship of communion with God the Father through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus speaks in many of his parables about the kingdom of God. For example, according to the Gospel of Matthew, the reign of God is like the yeast that causes the whole mass of dough to rise (13:33); like a buried treasure in a field (13:44); like the search for a fine pearl (13:45); like the good wheat that grows up among the weeds (13:30); and like a mustard seed (13:31). Each of these are things that are hidden in sight from the beginning but that are bountiful and of immense value when they are revealed in full.

We also learn from the images given as likenesses to the reign of God that something must be done in order to facilitate the springing forth of this reign. The yeast must be kneaded into the dough; the buried treasure and fine pearl must be uncovered; and the seed must be planted. Furthermore, the reign of God does not blossom instantly. It reveals itself over time. The seed produces first the blade, then the ear, and finally the ripe wheat in the ear (Mk 4:28).

The kingdom of God also requires a total commitment on our part. We, too, must go and sell everything in order to buy the field where the treasure is or to buy the pearl. We are to purge from our lives the weeds that separate and obscure our view of the good wheat.

The Gospels make this even clearer in the story of the rich young man, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me.” (Mt 19:21) One could also peruse the passages about the cost of discipleship found in Matthew 10:37-39 and Matthew 16:24-25.

**THY WILL BE DONE**

If the Triune God is a communion, then we must live into this communion, if we entertain any notion of seeking first the kingdom of God. That said, what specifically does this living into communion entail? St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians (2:1-2) provides the answer:

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.”

Communion with God means having the same mind, love, heart and thought as Christ, who was in perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit. But how can we enter into communion with the Son? We must do as Christ did. That is, we must become obedient, even unto death. We must give surrender our own wills to the will of the Father just as Jesus did.

**LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION**

Of course, the intention to surrender our wills to the Father’s will not be without the accompaniment of temptation. When Jesus had completed his 40 days and 40 nights of fasting in the desert, Scripture tells us he was hungry. Satan, seeing his opportunity, approaches him and tells him to change the stones to bread, in order to prove he truly was the Son of God. This was a temptation to self-sufficiency: a temptation for Jesus to do his own will; a temptation to fill the very real lack he suffered from on his own, independent of the Father.

Satan then took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the parapet of the Temple, and challenged him to throw himself down to show the truth of the Scripture. This was a temptation for Jesus to exercise power over the Father: a temptation to put himself before the kingdom; a temptation to self-importance and pride; a temptation to be understood, i.e., a temptation to be believed.

Finally, Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth from a high mountain. Satan promised Jesus all of them in exchange for Jesus’ worship. This was a temptation to serve a false god in exchange for temporal benefit: a temptation to submit to the will of a false god, in order to secure a temporal reward.

**IN CLOSING**

So, we end this reflection where we began with a consideration of what St. Claude de la Colombiere tells us of the temptations we, too, can expect if we make the decision to give up our wills this Lent to the will of the Father:

“Let us note here, with regard to the difficulties we may find in submitting to the will of God, that even when our will is firmly decided to submit, and has in fact submitted, our mind, following its natural inclination, may still continue to reason and argue on the events that are occurring or may occur. We may say to ourselves for example: ‘If I were now well, or if I were to fall ill, if I were given such and such a job, if I were sent to such and such a place, if such a and such a thing happened, it would be good (or bad) for me, it would help (or prevent) my plans, I could do this or that as I want to,’ and so on. Nature tries thus to obtain at least the satisfaction of thinking about and discussing the incidents of our lives. But we should endeavor to exterminate these remains of our corrupt nature, and just as for the love of God we have forbidden our mind the freedom of choice, for the same reason we ought to deny our mind the freedom of discussion and judgment. Let us entrust ourselves totally and unreservedly to the direction of Divine Providence.”
Martyrdom

Continued from Page 3

The differences between Egypt and the U.S. are striking, Fr. Messeh said, and the hardship for Christians in Egypt is difficult for Americans to truly grasp. Faith for the Copts is everything, “a life that they’re willing to lose for the sake of their faith.”

This is why the “extreme bravery” of the Coptic martyrs is so compelling, he said. “They’re doing the stuff that we’re preaching.”

“For us, you can get by with a Sunday-only faith,” he explained. “They can’t, because every day of their life they see in front of them the decision to follow Christ does impact the grades they get in school, it impacts which customers will come to their stores.”

And in some cases, their public faith is met with death.

The video of the beheadings shook his Virginia parish, Fr. Messeh admitted.

“It shook us up because it kind of put all those stories that we hear about, it kind of put it in pictures,” he said of the beheading video circulated by ISIS.

“Somehow this one really struck a chord with everyone, even people who have no connection with Egypt whatsoever.”

A church united in prayer over the killings will only be strengthened, Fr. John Farag of St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Cabin John, MD, told EWTN News Nightly on Wednesday.

“Copts live on prayers,” he remarked, explaining that the people are relying upon prayer and solidarity.

Local Coptic parishes will hold prayer services this weekend for the martyrs. Bishop Paul Loverde of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arlington even reached out in condolence, Fr. Messeh revealed, and offered to do a joint prayer service with St. Timothy and St. Athanasius parish. It was a gesture Fr. Messeh “really appreciated.”

He also thanked Pope Francis for offering a memorial Mass for the slain Coptic Christians earlier this week.

The pope mourned their deaths and hailed them as martyrs, also praying especially for Patriarch Tawadros of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

“The blood of our Christian brothers and sisters is a testimony which cries out to be heard,” Pope Francis said on Feb. 16. “Their only words were: ‘Jesus, help me!’”

Relatives of Coptic Christians purportedly murdered in Libya by self-proclaimed ISIS militants mourn for those killed. Photo: Mohamed el-Shahed/AFP/Getty

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Fr. Fischer is the chaplain of the Regina Pacis Latin Mass community and a member of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter.

The church has many riches which she places before her children for their needs and to help them grow. Passing on the faith through her teaching, healing, and strengthening us through sacraments, helping those who are in need, and assisting the dying who enter the next life. There are different and ancient rites of the church which offer the same sacraments in different ways, taking into account the spiritual needs of her members.

Among these differences was the return of the use of the rites of 1962, begun under Pope St. John Paul II, and brought to a wide and generous use by Pope Benedict XVI. The use of the traditional rite has spread throughout the world and is again growing in the Diocese of Lexington. The Regina Pacis Chaplaincy founded by Bishop Ronald W. Gainer is now in its twelfth year. It provides for those who desire the 1962 liturgical rites and spirituality. The chaplaincy is staffed by the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, an order founded by Pope St. John Paul II in 1988. Under the local bishops, the fraternity works in dioceses throughout the world caring for the faithful with the liturgical rites of 1962.

The Regina Pacis Chaplaincy is open to all the faithful in Lexington. St. Peter in Lexington provides a beautiful experience of grand architecture, Gregorian chant, and the solemnity and reverence of the ancient Roman Rite. This has brought about growth not only for those who fondly remember it from younger days, but many young families as well. The growth of our young families has been a blessing and sign of the future, not just for Regina Pacis, but for the whole church.

The growth of our families has brought the need for a place for the children. With the generosity of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Regina Pacis has added Masses at St. Francis de Sales in Georgetown. St. Francis de Sales, the second oldest Catholic church west of the Alleghenies, is a microcosm of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. We now have a wonderful place for the children to play and families to meet after Mass. Our families also share in praying for the souls buried in its cemetery. It is a great joy to be part of this history, and we look forward to more activities there. Regina Pacis also offers courses at Pax Christi and frequently aids at penance services in Lexington and Georgetown.

Masses at St. Francis de Sales are Friday and Sunday at 10 a.m. Masses at St. Peter are on Sundays at 4 p.m. and weekdays at 7 a.m.
Lent: Turning craving into yearning

MIKE ALLEN

Self-described as a “show about nothing,” the 1990s comedy Seinfeld sells itself short. Even if you view the show as a celebration of superficial and hedonistic narcissism (rather than a parody of the same, which is my view), there are moments when deeper truths break through.

Particularly insightful is the coffee shop conversation Kramer and George have in one episode. You might say, “Isn’t that every episode?” Point taken, but this specific exchange happens as Kramer is taking a fresh look at his own life and isn’t happy with what he sees. Instead of chasing his own dreams, he had been, in his own estimation, living vicariously through their mutual friend Jerry. He then accuses George of doing the same thing.

Taking their conversation to new existential depths, Kramer abruptly moves to George’s side of the booth, looks around for eavesdroppers, leans toward George and asks in a hushed tone, “Do you ever yearn?” Confused, George responds, “Yearn? Do I ever yearn?” To which Kramer affirms, “I yearn.” He continues “Oh, yes, Yes, I yearn. Often, I...I sit...and yearn.”

Kramer asks George again, “Have you yearned?” To which he replies, “Well, not recently. I’ve craved. I crave all the time, constant craving...but I haven’t yearned.”

At first glance, you might question the difference between these two words. Both craving and yearning speak of desire, of course, but their exchange reveals a subtle but crucial distinction: while craving refers to our drive to satisfy lower sensual appetites like hunger, thirst, and libido, yearning reflects the heart’s aspiration for ultimate ideals like love, truth, intimacy, and eternity.

In their brief sitcom exchange, Kramer and George encapsulate both the purpose of Lent and the nature of spiritual maturity—breaking free from craving and deepening our yearning.

Consider fasting, one of three classic Lenten practices. The person who fasts of bodily hunger toward a clearer discernment of what we ultimately need. It’s as if God, assuming we let him, can actually use our cravings to deepen our yearning.

So, we have to be careful not to dismiss temporal goods as unworthy of our desires. Catholics are not prudish, after all. While the danger always exists that we, like our ancient parents did in the garden, will think that temporal goods can satisfy infinite desires (the very definition of addiction), God has provided an instructive system for us in the sacraments.

As C.S. Lewis writes, “God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things...to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not:… He likes matter. He invented it.”

In the sacramental economy, Christ distributes the infinite grace of his death and resurrection to his mystical body via physical encounters with the material and finite. We crave bodily cleansing via water, and so our souls are purified of a far more lasting pollutant through baptism. Similarly, we seek the ecstasy of sexual union, and we discover in holy matrimony the elevation of our craving into the experience of yearning for faithful, interpersonal, and life-giving communion. And then, there is the Eucharist, our supreme encounter with Christ this side of death, the source and summit of our faith, and the food that transcends all earthly banquets.

These sacramental analogies work in the opposite direction than we think. It’s not as if the sacraments approximate the more practical expressions of our earthly desires. Rather, earthly washing, marriage, eating, and drinking only find meaning as signs that foreshadow the greater things to which they point.

Lent’s small sacrifices can serve to remind us that we were made for better things and provide an opportunity for God to use this season within each of us to transform George’s cravings into Kramer’s yearning.

King David was many things, but was he a saint?

FATHER PAUL PRABELL

Q Is King David a saint?
A David has not been canonized as a saint by the church. There is no designated feast day for him. However, his name and spirit are honored throughout the Jewish and Christian religions.

The basic story of David is told in the First and Second Books of Samuel. David is introduced as the eighth and youngest son of Jesse. David is a ruddy and handsome shepherd boy. He is anointed by the prophet Samuel as the second king of the Jewish people, but also s the first king directly chosen by God. When he was anointed king (even as Saul was still reigning) the Spirit of God came upon David.

David soon became a part of King Saul’s entourage, serving as his armor-bearer and a minstrel whose music provided some peace for the moody, depressed, and spirit-bereft Saul. When faced with the challenge of the Philistine giant Goliath, young David slew him with stones from his slingshot. But David’s reliance on God was the key. David’s defeat of Goliath and development into a king has become an inspiration for underdogs throughout the ages.

However, as the Books of Samuel reveal, David’s life became very complicated. As David rose in power and popularity, Saul grew increasingly jealous. David also had to deal with Israelite leaders loyal to Saul, as well as threats and battles with the Philistines and other hostile neighbors. Moreover, David faced severe problems within his own family, and within himself. Several vignettes demonstrate the intensely good, bad, and ugly in David’s life.

As a young man David and Saul’s son Jonathan became close and loyal friends and helped one another in several difficult situations. Theirs is one of the most inspiring friendships described in the Bible.

David was hunted by Saul and his army who sought to kill him. There was an occasion when David found Saul asleep and vulnerable. David could have easily killed him and ascended then to the throne, but instead he had mercy and spared Saul’s life.

David lived in a time when harems were common. He married Saul’s daughter Michal and later married two other women who were from important families, in order to strengthen his growing quest for power. And when he was attracted to Bethsheba, he sexually exploited her and then orchestrated the death of her husband Uriah, so he could marry her.

Later in life, one of David’s sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. David did nothing to punish Amnon. Tamar’s brother Absalom was enraged, killed Amnon, and eventually rebelled against his father, led an army against his father’s troops, and was killed in the battle. David sorely grieved over his dysfunctional family and their violent deaths, even as his own life was defined by intrigue and violence.

David established Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish kingdom, a city of peace, a city of shalom. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, with the mixed motives of faith and a desire to have God on his side. He began to develop plans for a temple in Jerusalem, but that task and honor were left for his son Solomon.

Approximately three centuries after the Books of Samuel were written, the Books of Chronicles were written. Their purpose was to tell “the rest of the story” and thus boost the national confidence and self-esteem of the Jewish people, as they were rebuilding in the aftermath of the exile periods. Chronicles downplays the chaotic and mercurial aspects of David’s life and projects the good King David, whose spirit of prayer was at the center of the development of the Psalms. Chronicles describes David as a successful and brilliant military leader, devoted to God, devoted to planning the temple’s construction, devoted to developing Jewish culture and worship.

David was both a saint and a sinner; he trusted God and tried to manipulate God. He was simple and he was cunning, at times noble, at times despicable. He was unscrupulous and also humble repentant. The name David means “beloved.” Like all of us, he was loved by God. And like all of us, he was at his best, when he sought to live in the light of God’s love.
The discipline for discipleship

MSGR. JOSEPH G. PRIOR
1ST SUNDAY OF LENT • FEBRUARY 22, 2015

“Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” Jesus inaugurates his public ministry this way in the Gospel according to Mark. We hear it anew, now, as we begin the Lent.

“Repent” is from the Greek word metanoia, which means “change one’s mind.” Repentance is not just an exhortation to change behavior but to have an inner transformation, whereby one’s whole life is reoriented toward God. Jesus exemplifies in his person. All his actions and teachings are rooted in this. He invites us to share in this.

Repentance is all encompassing. Responding in faith to Jesus and His Gospel opens the door for this transformation to take place.

Lent provides an opportunity for us to focus on repentance and faith. The trifold penance of Lent—prayer, fasting and almsgiving—are the ways we “keep” Lent. Sometimes the term “discipline” is used, because it involves a training, in this case training as disciples.

Prayer is described in many ways, one of which is active listening. Listening to the Lord speak to us and inviting us to share in his life. Daily Mass, meditation, Stations of the Cross, and short daily reflections on the readings of the day are some of the ways in which we might pray during the season.

The dedicated time to prayer also reminds us of Jesus’ 40 days in the desert. The Gospel passage recalls Jesus’ being driven to the desert where he fasts for 40 days, while being tempted by the devil. Jesus’ 40 days prepared him for public ministry. He will be tempted and tried many times, during these three years, but he remains faithful to the Father. Lent helps to strengthen us in living the life that Jesus won for us and prepares us for the celebration of Easter.

Fasting is when we “give up” something for Lent. Our communal fast occurs on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday when we only eat one meal. In a broader sense the fasting includes our communal observance of “abstinence” on the Fridays of Lent were we do not eat meat. In willingly choosing not to partake of food or drink or an activity, we recognize that God gives us something much more. We grow in our awareness of God’s presence and our dependence on him alone. Through the discipline of the fast we are strengthened to live the Gospel we profess.

Prayer and fasting culminate in almsgiving. Giving to the poor and needy is an act of love; love for our neighbor. In almsgiving we recognize that all we have is a gift from God. The love that God has for us, in the very gift of life itself, calls us to share what we have with others, especially the poor and needy. In doing this we walk the way of Jesus who gave up everything, including life itself, in love for us.

“Believe in the Gospel,” Jesus says after calling for “repentance.” Fundamental to belief is trust. Trusting that he truly leads us to life; that he delivers us from all that can harm us; that he forgives our sins. We see this faith of the early disciples and followers of Jesus. Perhaps the story of the father whose son is tormented by demons helps us to understand that there is always room for more faith in our lives. In that encounter, a father asks Jesus to heal his son. The son is brought before Jesus and the boy is thrown into convulsions. The father pleads: “If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus replies “If you can! Everything is possible to the one who has faith.” Then the father replies: “I do believe, help my unbelief.” The discipline of Lent helps us to continue our growth in faith.

Lent also serves as a preparation for the celebration of the Triduum and Easter. The first and second readings for today’s liturgy remind us of this through God’s covenant with Noah. In Christ the story of the flood reaches its fulfillment. The waters of the flood afforded mankind a new beginning. First Peter makes the association between these waters of the flood and baptism. Through baptism we are immersed in the passion and death of the Lord by which our sins are forgiven. Becoming one with him in death, we are promised likewise a share in his resurrection. At Easter, we respond to his gift of life by our profession of faith and the renewal of our baptismal promises. To celebrate this gift more readily at Easter, we willingly engage the discipline of Lent.

Having a heart of gold is not what Christianity’s about

FATHER ROBERT BARRON

Many atheists and agnostics today insistently argue that it is altogether possible for non-believers in God to be morally upright. They resent the implication that the denial of God will lead inevitably to complete ethical relativism or nihilism. They are quick to point out examples of non-religious people who are models of kindness, compassion, justice, etc. In point of fact, a recent article has proposed that non-believers are actually, on average, more morally praiseworthy than religious people. God knows (pun intended) that during the last 20 years we’ve seen plenty of evidence from around the world of the godly behaving very badly indeed.

Though I could quarrel with a number of elements, I would actually gladly concede the major point that it is altogether possible for atheists and agnostics to be morally good. The classical Greek and Roman formulators of the theory of the virtues were certainly not believers in the Biblical God, and many of their neo-pagan successors today do indeed exhibit fine moral qualities. What I should like to do, however, is to use this controversy to make a larger point, namely that Christianity is not primarily about ethics, about “being a nice person,” or, to use Flannery O’Connor’s wry formula, “having a heart of gold.” The ultimate purpose is to make us ethically better, Christianity has lost its raison d’etre.

The inaugural speech of Jesus, as reported in the Gospel of Mark, commences with the theme is the laying out of a moral vision. The first and second readings for today’s liturgy of the post-September 11 era is conditioned by a similar suspicion? Accordingly, he argued that, at its best, religion is not about dogma or doctrine or liturgy but about ethics. In the measure that the Scriptures, prayer, and belief make one morally good, they are admissible, but in the measure that they lead to moral corruption, they should be dispensed with. As religious people mature, he felt, they would naturally let those relatively extrinsic practices and convictions fall to the side and would embrace the ethical core of their belief systems. Kant’s army of disciples today think that Christianity ought to be de-supernaturalized and re-presented as essentially a program of inclusion and social justice.

The problem with this Kantianism is that it runs dramatically counter to the witness of the first Christians. The letters of St. Paul, which are the earliest Christian texts we have, are particularly instructive. One can find “ethics” in the writings of Paul, but one would be hard pressed indeed to say that the principal theme is the laying out of a moral vision. The central motif of all of those letters is, in fact, Jesus Christ risen from the dead. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus is the sign that the world as we know it—a world marked by death and the fear of death—is evanescent and that a new order of things is emerging. The “new creation” is shorthand for the overturning of the old world and the emergence of a new order through the resurrection of Jesus. The inaugural speech of Jesus, as reported in the Gospel of Mark, commences with the announcement of the kingdom of God and then the exhortation to “repent and believe the good news.” We tend automatically to interpret repentance as a summons to moral conversion, but the Greek word that Mark employs is metanoia, which means literally, “go beyond the mind you have.” Jesus is urging his listeners to change their way of thinking, so as to see the new world that is coming into existence. It is indeed the case that Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists, and agnostics can all be “good people.” But only Christians witness to an earthquake that has shaken the foundations of the world and turned every expectation upside down. A key to the new evangelization is the rediscovery of this revolutionary message.
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