



DIOCESE OF AMARILLO

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A Reflection on Christian Life

Today is the Memorial of a good friend of mine, St. Augustine of Hippo, also a brother bishop. One of his most famous lines is this: *“Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord.”* (St. Augustine, Confessions) There has been a lot of unrest in the Cathedral parish for the last few months; actually, in reality, for some decades.

You no doubt have heard of or perhaps even read the now infamous accusations against myself, your Rector and the associate Rector. These were obviously made by *‘a few’*, emphasis on a few, souls that appear to be quite *restless*.

I have mentioned in many homilies in recent years that our country is in dire straits. What Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J. wrote several years ago in an article seems to have penetrated our country completely. He said: The southwest seems to have evolved a new philosophy which he termed, *“exaggerated frontier individualism”*. This has dulled our society and permitted a philosophy of *“non-distinction; all is equal!”* to emerge. Therefore, there is no distinction between light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsehood, or Virtue and sin. However, we Christians have a solution to this; we need to rediscover the art of discernment and chose the virtuous way.

The Church lives within a society; it is not immune to its culture. We see the horrific effects of this in our country. There is no civility, no truth; people feel free to make any and every absurd accusation to put down anyone with whom they disagree. People only shout at each other, make terrible accusations and judgements and degrade the dignity of the human person. I believe this commandment is still in force. *“Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor!”* (Seventh Commandment of the Decalogue) Our culture has entered into a new, damaging darkness. There is no dialogue anymore; only accusations!

This has found its way into the Church. We who follow Christ as Christians are called to be the “Light of the world”; yet “a few” of our number have allowed the secular influence to dominate their life and hence their light has dimmed. However, I live in Hope! St. John wrote; “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” (Jn. 1:5 – Prologue)

I can understand this influence of our secular society; but it does not justify constant violation of the Seventh Commandment of the Decalogue! A lie is a lie...always! And the constant and insistent claim “*I have proof*” means nothing when all is fabricated.

What has happened is that some of our number have lost focus. Remember when St. Peter attempted to walk on the water of the Sea of Galilee? As long as he remained focused on Jesus, he was able to do the impossible...walk on water! However, as soon as he looked down at the powerful waves and felt the strong wind, he began to sink.

The focus must always...always...remain on Jesus. When we lose that focus, we begin to adopt other secular vices. We no longer love. Or the love that God has for us ceases to be transforming. We lose the capacity to realize “I, as a lay person, do not always have all the knowledge”; while it is quite probable that the deacon, priest or bishop has a much fuller picture of what is actually happening.

A further concern, even if an explanation is given, is that it is always summarily dismissed; and then another false narrative appears. It never ends.

Another concern is in the form of a question: why is it that everyone seems to believe everything that appears on a social media page, and worse, may pass it on as truth. It appears that the Gospel is forgotten. Or friendship gets in the way of truth and being an ambassador for Christ.

I am also compelled to share some events in regard to the treatment of the priests that serve you. First is the persistent rumor that Msgr. Colwell, your Rector is an alcoholic. I have consulted with two physicians caring for Msgr. and both are very clear that he is not an alcoholic. He is suffering from a very high blood pressure that is only made worse by the unnecessary stress he has endured for months. Second your Associate Rector Fr. Roy has been badgered by persistent phone calls on his cell during the night. People were

calling throughout the night, preventing him from getting a good night's sleep. Then another violation of the Seventh Commandment came: *"Fr. Roy does not have a cell phone because the Bishop took it away from him."* Third is the constant mantra, *"all the priests hate the bishop."* If anything, this behavior of *"the Few"* has strengthened the sense of brotherhood among us priests.

I must also remind you that this behavior of *"the few"* is having a definite effect in regard to the promotion of vocations to the priesthood. All the parishes, missions and convents of the Diocese are saying the Prayer for Vocations at each Mass. What a beautiful witness this is to each member of the Body of Christ here in our diocese! On the first of June we celebrated the Ordination of two very good young men to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. What a glorious day it was. However, I was brought down to reality very quickly when a mother of a young man shared this with me. *"Bishop, how can I ever encourage my son to enter the seminary and be ordained a priest when some people in the Church treat priests so badly!"* This is a very serious and real question. If this behavior by *"the few"* does not end soon, we may not have an ordination for a long time.

On this feast of St. Augustine I am reminded of his concern for the peace and unity of the Church...the Body of Christ on this earth. What has happened in the Cathedral is unconscionable. The focus on Christ must be restored; then peace, healing and tranquility will return. Just yesterday afternoon another social media communication was sent out. One line interested me very much. *"I am stepping away from this issue until our parish and our diocese are stabilized."* This is a clear indication that this one of *"the few"* has no intention to stop causing division in the Body of Christ. His line is quite clear; he only wants division and disunity.

This is in direct opposition to the fervent prayer that Christ uttered in the Garden the night before he died. His prayer to the Father was so sincere and intense that *"his sweat became as drops of blood"*. (Lk. 22:44) He said, *"Father, may they be one, as you are in me and I am in you...that the world may believe that you sent me."* (Jn. 17:21)

Pope Francis clearly manifested his thoughts last February of this year. A good Christian is known for three things: Prayer, ordinary, everyday acts of Charity and Passive Charity that is *"Love one another and do not criticize each other."* He said the same for a Good Parish with the emphasis on Passive Charity; *"Love one another and do not criticize each other."* (Pope Francis, Homily, San Julio Parish, Rome, April 8, 2019)

Now that I have finished part of my experience with this “*the few*” I need to address you who are not part of them.

I now speak to all the rest of you, the parishioners of St. Mary’s Cathedral Parish. You are the faithful and loyal disciples that the Lord Jesus desires. I am so sorry that you have to experience this awful bashing against other members of the Body of Christ manifested here. I cannot thank you enough! I am proud of you; your Rector, your Associate Rector, all my brother priests are very proud of you.

Thank you for supporting Msgr. Colwell and Fr Roy. They and all my brother priests have given their lives for the service of the Gospel and the mission of Christ as manifested through their ministry in the Church. They are not seeking wealth or fame and certainly not power or control. They became priests to serve you and help you to grow spiritually. They are here to satiate your hunger and to quench your thirst. Christ is both our food and our drink. He is both the Bread of life and the dew of the Holy Spirit that together nourish man’s deepest hopes and desires. *“I, Christ, am the food of grown men; grow then, and you will feed on me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food, but you will be changed into me.”* Then Augustine adds: *“I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.”* (St. Augustine, Confessions)

You have and are experiencing this. My prayer is that you continue to grow into the full stature of Christ that the Lord intends for each of you. May your love for each other abound more and more until the Day of Christ Jesus. Continue to be Christ...be the light that transforms the world.

Finally please pray for all who are restless: that they may find peace and tranquility.

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Your Shepherd and Bishop,
August 28, 2019
Feast of St. Augustine of Hippo