

### THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (2024 - B)

Every now and then you hear about people who go ice fishing (not this year of course ...). Anyhow, every now and then you hear about people who are ice fishing when the ice suddenly breaks off from shore. It doesn't take long before there's open water between the fishermen and land, and they can't go back and forth. You can't jump from the ice to land. The distance is too great. There is a separation.

Here is another example of separation. Nearly all of our ancestors came from someplace else. Most came from Europe. A few came from Central America and a few from Africa.

In my case, they came from Bohemia, Poland, Germany and England. When my ancestors first came to America, they would write back to those they left behind in Europe, and those they left behind would write back. They would send Christmas greetings, announcements of weddings and news from back home. Another thing is this. All these letters would be in their native languages. My grandfather wrote to his relatives in German and my grandmother wrote to hers in Polish.

However, it's now been many years and several generations since my ancestors came to America, and we have lost touch with the Europeans. I don't speak their language. I'm not particularly interested in what's going on in their countries, and except for one person whom I recently met through the internet (my second half-cousin once removed), I don't even know where they live. There is a separation. We are two different peoples with two different languages and two different cultures, and two different customs. I am sure this is probably true for most of you as well.

So why do I bring this up today? Why do I bring up this idea of separation? It's because this same thing has happened to us today with regard to religion.

We Catholics now live in a different world than most of the people around us. We have different customs and different cultures and different languages. The world around us has changed and anyone who tries to live in both worlds will be like one of those ice fishermen who tries to get back to shore. You are just going to fall in, get soaking wet and freeze to death.

Consider this. We have our Catholic language and the pagans have theirs. We have words like Mass and Sacraments and Salvation and Redemption and Trinity and Incarnation and Saints and Commandments and Creation and Soul and Original Sin and Lent and Easter and Nativity and Resurrection and Heaven and Hell and Judgment and Everlasting Life.

This is a language modern pagans do not speak. They have no idea what these words mean. They have no idea what we are talking about. We are speaking a foreign language to them. If you doubt this, just ask a pagan coworker or classmate what happened on Easter?

We also have two different cultures. First, before all else, we acknowledge God as our Creator. As such we give Him worship and adoration every week at Mass. The Church calls holy Mass "the source and summit of the Christian life."

In fact, all we do in life is built around the worship we give to Almighty God. We believe that this act of worship, this submission to God's power and authority is so important that to deliberately miss Mass is a mortal sin and endangers our salvation. That's because to do so is an act of rebellion against our Creator. Like Satan, we say, "I will not serve." I love other things more than God.

On the other hand, our pagan culture has no qualms about using Sundays for other things besides the worship of God. Sports, work, leisure activities, meetings, but not God.

In our Catholic culture, we also acknowledge that every single human being is our brother or sister in Christ. We are all created in God's image and likeness. Consequently, we reject the very idea of abortion, the killing of an unborn child. We reject contraceptive drugs and devices that can kill the newly conceived child. We reject the idea of physician assisted suicide and the idea of suicide itself as well as all other forms of unjust killing. In fact, we reject all attacks on the dignity of human person. We also reject the idea of transgenderism, and the mutilation of the bodies of boys and girls and men and women by unethical medical practitioners.

On the other hand, our pagan culture embraces abortion. In fact, keeping it legal is one of the main platforms of the Democratic party this year. Our pagan culture is angered over the one state, Alabama that declared embryos, newly conceived children, to be persons under the law. Our pagan culture embraces transgenderism. Finally, our pagan culture embraces assisted suicide which our Minnesota legislature is poised to approve this year.

We also have two different customs. We believe that marriage is for love and for life where a man and a woman promise to be faithful to each other until they are parted by death. In that partnership of the whole of life, they will grow in love for each other and together, they will raise the children that God grants to them. In this way they will sanctify each other and work out their salvation.

For these reasons, we don't live together before marriage. We believe that sexual intimacy is a sign of the union of hearts. That is why we say the union of hearts – expressed in the couple's marriage vows – must come before the union of bodies.

On the other hand, our pagan culture, rejects both love and life. It believes sexual intimacy is nothing more than a form of recreation. It need not involve commitment, nor care nor concern for the other person. In our pagan culture, men have objectified women and treat them as things to be used and ogled. Hence the widespread use of pornography. At the same time, women have degraded themselves by showing off their bodies and encouraging men to see them as just things to be used. Our pagan culture even rejects the natural law and calls relationships between two men or two women marriage.

I could go on with many other examples of how we Catholics now live in a different world than most of the people around us, but you get the point. We are two separate peoples.

There is now a separation between us and the world around us. We have different customs and different cultures and different languages, and anyone who tries to live in both worlds will be unsuccessful. You will simply end up compromising your faith and in the end losing your salvation.

Now, there is no need to be discouraged here. We are called on to be joyful people. Saint Paul even says to us "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice (Phil 4:4)."

It's only when we try to live in both worlds, that we will experience discouragement and sadness. When we try hanging on to what the pagans are doing, we are going to be sad. That's because our hearts are divided, and we are trying to love both God and the world, but we can't do both. We have to choose between one or the other.

Two years ago in Lent, I spoke to you about the need for us to build a parish ark. This would be a place for us to ride out the storm until the winds of paganism die out, and I am certain they will because the pagan culture will have no offspring. It has embraced a culture of death, and so, it will produce nothing. It's only a matter of time before it disappears.

In the meantime however, we need a place where we can share our faith, support each other and grow in the love of God, and that is our parish ark.

Over the past two years, we have established extended times for Adoration in both parishes. Between both parishes, there are now over 40 people who are spending an hour a week in prayer before the Lord. I want to encourage those of you who have not done so to consider taking an hour. Pray about it and see if this is something the Lord is calling you to do. We all need quiet time with God, and this is a great way to spend an hour of your week.

We have also established 14 small groups where you can share your faith, pray, and enjoy the company of others who want to grow in God's love. These groups meet at different times and days and cater to different ages. Find one that fits you and join. Or, if there isn't one that fits you, start one. We need fellowship in our world today. It helps to make friends with others who believe what we believe, and it helps to know that we are not just isolated lone rangers.

By the way, something great is beginning to happen with our small groups. People who are looking for the truth, people who are seeking the light are joining them. Our small groups are becoming places where we can share our faith in Jesus with those who do not know him.

Our readings today speak of the commandments. These laws of God are there to help us grow in love of God and neighbor. In that sense, they are like operating instructions for the human being.

Our pagan world rejects the Commandments and encourages us to do the same, but we cannot do so if we hope to gain eternal life. At the same time, we cannot keep God's Commandments without help when state laws bid us do otherwise. That is why we need our parish ark. There we can find good Christian friends and support as we seek to do God's will.

Today, we must acknowledge that we and the modern pagans are separate peoples. We have different languages, different customs and different cultures. Because we have the words of everlasting life, we follow Jesus Christ, and we embrace all the teachings He entrusted to His holy Catholic Church. Let us do this with a joyful heart, let us support each other, and let us share our holy Catholic faith with all those who seek the truth. Amen.