

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

Elusive Unity

One of the remarkable statistics that emerged from the national elections is that it is estimated that 92% of African Americans voted for President Obama. Such is an obvious expression of cohesion and unity.

I then reflected what if the 60 million or so self-identified Catholics came together in a similar expression of unity? Would that have a significant impact? The challenge to us is to respond to the Gospel to be what we are called to be – “leaven, light and salt” to the human community.

At the conclusion of the vote counting, it is not a time for winners to gloat and losers to mope into a tailspin. But rather it is time to evaluate how we have fared in the call to be that leaven in the world that Jesus has challenged us to be.

The first step, I suggest, is to retreat from our unfailing loyalty to a particular political philosophy whether it be republican, democrat or independent. The probing question should be what are the foundational principles that guide me as a Catholic/Christian? Are they easily identified, reasonably formed and courageously implemented. Should not the unity and consistency of the Gospel lead to basic conclusions?

Obviously, the first step in any reassessment is to place the highest priority on our Gospel values which are intended to be the guiding light of our conscience in exercising our participation in all secular pursuits. In addition, the evolution and development of the social Gospel in modern times since Rerum Novarum and Pope Leo XIII play a significant role in establishing a central focus on the life and dignity of the human person.

The starting place for forming our consciences is that which is inbred in human nature the natural law or what the founders of our country spoke of in the Declaration of Independence as “self-evident truth.”

Deeply probing the natural law, we discover actions that are intrinsically evil and thus in opposition to this law. They are abortion, euthanasia, embryonic destructive research, cloning, genocide, torture, racism and the targeting of innocents in war or terrorism. Since these evils are universal, our advocacy and insistence on them is not an imposition of our religion on others – but really a surfacing of non-negotiable principles which exist for the protection of everyone.

We move from these foundational realities to their evolution in the Gospel wherein we are called to be perpetual voices for the dignity of every human person. Herein, enters the voice of Matthew 25 where Christ insists: “As long as you have done so to the least of my brothers and sisters you have done so to me.”

In breeding a culture that represents the dignity of the human person we must face unacceptable situations – the death of 5 million children worldwide because of malnutrition, the denial of essential human rights, the widespread corruption that squanders abundant resources resulting in untold poverty and suffering and the assault on creation and the environment.

Many of these prevailing negatives could be transformed into positives and give hope and a compelling vision of God’s continuing care exercised through His Body in the world – the Church, the people of God.

In this time of post-election reflection, in this period of regrouping, I suggest that our goal is not to form a new party – but that all Christian/Catholics carefully reflect upon those bedrock principles that are derived from self-evident truth, the Gospels and the Church’s moral and social teaching and that we come together in unity in advocacy of our mutually held convictions, and be the leaven in our political parties, in our secular undertakings.

This posture could reap positive benefits. Consider the revolutionary changes that would occur if both of our political parties adhered to scientific truth and the natural law and were committed to absolutely protecting human life from the moment of conception until natural death?

Coming together and coalescing around our deeply held convictions could eventuate in a nation and world ever more synchronized with God’s will and love. If 92% of 60 U.S. million Catholics found unity in the Gospel and Church’s basic teachings, do you believe we could make a difference?