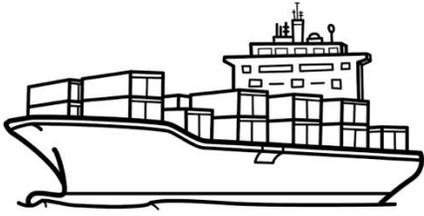


“That Ship has Sailed”



Currently, due to the pandemic conditions, every Catholic is under a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday. Last week's reflection touched upon this topic. The notion of people attending Mass based on the category of "obligation" is almost laughable in our day. Certainly, it is an objectively valid "precept" of the Church: We must observe the Lord's Day through the Celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass. But, in the *land of the free*, "obligation" is an obscenity. *No one tells me what to do! I am the highest authority in my life!* Well, that is questionable. But the reality is that, obligation or not, people attend weekly Mass because they have faith that it is good and right and that it redounds to their growth in the Grace of God. When it comes to 'obligation' as a primary motivation, "that ship has sailed."

In fact, it seems that very many "ships have sailed:"

Living together and sex before/outside of the bond of marriage has long been the rule, not the exception. The wisdom of the Church is that the sexual act between a man and a woman is the "consummation" of the marriage and, thereafter, it is an aspect of marital unity and, above all, for the procreation of children who will become baptized followers of Jesus Christ.

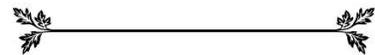
The secular culture has rendered this beautiful and logical vision an absurdity. The most meaningful and intimate union between persons has been dislodged from its God-ordained context and become a quasi-unifying, non-procreative, recreational activity. When you set the sacred vision side-by-side with the modern, secular reality, the devaluation is stunning and tragic.

Only a couple of decades ago, the idea of a man marrying a man or a woman marrying a woman would have been considered an utter absurdity. Marriage was defined by the complementarity of

male and female as well as the power of procreation. But in the most radical act of deconstructionism, the word marriage was ripped from its anchorage in reality. Absurdity has become normative. And to say this is to be considered a terrible "bigot." But, no insult is intended when one speaks from the order of reality as it presents itself. Subjective feelings of love and attraction don't change the structures of creation.

Now the world insists that we accept that a person should be able to redefine himself as the opposite of his/her sexual identity at birth. Once again, feelings and psychological distress are, somehow, more valid than real, tangible evidence. And so, rather than helping someone cope with a "dysphoria," (defined as a state of unease or generalized dissatisfaction with life), reality itself is called into question.

And, finally, the tragic history of abortion is at the head of all these "hot button" issues as the substitution of reality with the requirements of an absolutized personal autonomy. Here I speak of the politicized, "abortion-on-demand" mentality apart from the more complicated issues of pregnancy arising from rape or incest: Those require a more compassionate and nuanced treatment. The reality is that other human beings gestate in the womb of a mother and are determined toward no other end than emerging as distinct persons from the mother. It cannot, therefore, be a matter of "*my body, my choice.*"



All of these matters could be dismissed as *fait accompli* or, as we say, "*that ship has sailed*" . . . as if there is no longer hope to bring us back to a state of sanity, responsibility and reverence for creation. But, I suggest, we must not allow despair rule the day. The culture has descended into insanity. From the stance of God-given reason and faith, we must stand for what is true; even if it means merely being "*a voice crying out in the desert.*" Yes, the Church is discredited, battered and beaten to a pulp by her own sinners; those are the cards we've been dealt. But the truth remains beautiful. We cannot do creation better than our Creator. If only we pray for the grace to speak it with passionate love for our neighbors and for the God who has loved us into being.