

September 12, 2020

Twenty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today, we celebrate at St. Louise the beautiful devotion that comes from our parishioners from India, Our Lady of Vailankanni, or also known as Our Lady of Good Health. It breaks my heart, we are not able to celebrate in the way we normally would first, due to the pandemic, (I will sure miss this year the wonderful Indian food we normally have with this celebration), and second, with the poor air quality, we had to cancel the public celebration of our weekend Masses. The air quality in Seattle, Portland and San Francisco is currently the poorest in the world. As God's faithful people, we never give up on turning to Our Lady to ask for her intercession that our loving God may hear her request for good health in our time.

We are in desperate need of good health. We all need good health especially in our time to protect us from the effects of the coronavirus that have caused serious health concerns and even death for numerous people in our parish and around the world. We think of the mental and emotional anguish many are suffering, the struggle with our schools and our economy. We need good health for our earth, which is burning up across the Western United States, wildfires have caused injury, sickness and death and the destruction of entire communities. We still live with the gaping wound of racial division and violence in our streets. The final words of far, far too many black persons who were arrested, "I can't breathe" were also the final words of many people who died of COVID-19, and are now everyone's words as we go outside with hazardous levels of contamination. "I can't breathe" are figuratively the words for our spiritual, emotional and mental burdens.

We need healing as a nation, a nation that seems to have lost the art of civil political debate and has become so divided that some are beginning to wonder if there will be riots following the elections. There also deep divides among Catholics. We have heard Catholics on both the right and the left say, "How could anyone who calls themselves a good Catholic ever vote for . . . ?" You fill in the blank. We need good health and we will need good spiritual health most especially for these next seven weeks before Election Day. We need to listen deeply to the words of the Scripture and to the teaching of our Church, and today, with the intercession of Our Lady of Vailankanni to be healthy.

The Book of Sirach gives us wise words to help us look deep into our soul: "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner holds them tight." Jesus builds on that teaching when he tells Peter to forgive not seven times but seventy-seven times. Anger, if we allow it, will kill the soul. Forgiveness, even if the one who offend does not ask for us forgiveness, will bring peace to the one who forgives from the heart. We forgive not so much because the one who offends us deserves forgiveness, rather we forgive because God has forgiven us, even though we do not deserve God's forgiveness. Jesus was born, lived suffered, died and rose again so that we could know the forgiveness of our sins. To be Christian is to live the forgiveness that Christ so generously gave to us. Forgiveness is our way of life as Catholics. So much so that Jesus gives us

the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that we can experience forgiveness and to teach us how to forgive.

Allow me for a moment to turn to the teaching of the Church from one of the documents of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which says in paragraph 74: *“the people who come together in the political community are many and diverse, and they have every right to prefer divergent solutions.”* A Pastoral Constitution bears the weight of official Church teaching. The Church upholds Gospel values that rightly have a place in the public debate. At the same time, the Church can never tell people how to vote nor which political strategy is the best to build a society that upholds the dignity of every human person. For instance, without a doubt, it is the duty of every Catholic to form their conscience with study, discussion and prayer before they vote. Abortion is an issue that no Catholic can ignore and most especially late term abortions. While this one issue must be at the forefront, it is certainly not the only issue to consider. No one political platform captures the whole of our pro-life teaching nor the entirety of our Catholic Social teaching. This is exactly why the official teaching of the Church says that people have “every right to divergent solutions.” When would it be sinful for vote for a candidate that supports abortion? If you or I vote for that candidate *because* they support abortion. As faithful Catholics, we still all have the obligation, no matter how we vote, to walk the path of the Church to defend human life in all its stages from its natural beginning to its natural end. We can write and tell Catholic politicians who say that they believe in the sacredness of life personally, but that they do not want to impose their faith on others that our task in the public debate is not to *impose* our Catholic faith rather, to *propose* the path that upholds the dignity of human life. I am thankful that St. Louise parishioners stepped up on our game and filled a bus for the March for Life in January this year, thanks to efforts the Gospel of Life Committee and the work of Katie O’Neill. Katie has also been instrumental in the food distribution program that together with Catholic Community Services that we have done here at St. Louise, in fact, just this morning, to help families during this severe downturn in our economy, which is also a pro-life activity. We can always do more.

As your pastor, I feel compelled to speak to you of the importance of conscience formation and voting you because of a video that a priest has produced recently that has gone viral and has raised questions for Catholics. While he is courageous in his pro-life stance, and to be honest, he challenges me to be more courageous, he simply goes beyond what the Catholic Church upholds when he says that it not possible for a faithful Catholic to vote for a Democrat and that in fact, any Catholic who does so could be condemned to hell. Based on the official teaching of our faith, those words are *not* what the Catholic Church upholds.

Now, perhaps more than ever, we need healing and reconciliation. Our US bishops have asked that we consider taking the “Civilize It” Pledge this election season, which reads:

1. *To recognize the human dignity of those with whom I disagree, treat others with respect, and rise above attacks when directed at me.*

2. *To root my political viewpoints in the Gospel and a well formed conscience, which involves prayer, study and listening. I will stand up for my convictions and speak out when I witness language that disparages others' dignity, while also listening and seeking to understand other's experiences.*
3. *To encounter others with a tone and posture which affirms that I honor the dignity of others and invites other to do the same. I will presume others' best intentions and listen to their stories with empathy. I will strive to understand before seeking to be understood.*

We as church need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and on his call to us to be a “sign of unity and an instrument of peace” (Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II) in this time of great division. Our Lady of Vailankanni, Our Lady of Good health, intercede for us for the good health of all!