

The Rosary, Faith and the Public Square

At first glance, it may seem that nothing could be further from the Public Square than the Feast of Our Lady of Rosary, which we celebrate today with the Church throughout the world. Some contend that few things are as publicly irrelevant as the 900-year old practice of reciting the Hail Mary 50 times in succession, interrupted periodically by a Glory Be and an Our Father and then the announcement of a Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful or Glorious Mystery.

But consider the following. At Planned Parenthood facilities and other abortion mills all across the USA, Christians pray the rosary every day. By doing so, they make a public statement of protest against the shameful and unjust decision of the U.S. Supreme Court: *Roe v. Wade*. We pray for an end to this horrific evil; we pray for mothers facing difficult pregnancies and for their babies in the womb. We also pray for the conversion of abortionists and of public officials who support and perpetuate this injustice.

Consider, too, the events that occurred on Tepeyac Hill near modern-day Mexico City in A.D. 1531 when Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to an Indian man named Juan Diego. The events of that day, with the accompanying miraculous image imprinted on Juan Diego's Tilma (or robe), seemed of minor

significance at first. But, within months, through that event, the Virgin Mary restored hope to the disheartened Indian peoples of Mexico and began to bring about reconciliation between the conquerors and the conquered, the Conquistadores and the Indians they had defeated.

Within five years, millions of Indians entered the Church, even though they had vigorously resisted the Catholic faith prior to Mary's appearance at Tepeyac. Our Lady of Guadalupe exercised a great impact on the history of Mexico from that time forward. Still today, devotion to her influences the Mexican public square and the lives of millions of people beyond the borders of Mexico.

Recall, too, how the Nazi tyrant, Adolph Hitler, tried to destroy the identity and the culture of the people of Poland during World War II. One of Hitler's aims was to crush the Catholic faith and especially to end devotion to the Mother of God. So, he prohibited pilgrimages to the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa at Jasna Gora. Nevertheless, the pilgrimages continued unabated. Devotion to the rosary increased; and Poles everywhere remained steadfast in their confidence in Virgin Mary. When World War II ended, Nazi Germany was defeated, not Poland. Hitler died a disgraceful death.

Devotion to the Mother of God takes place in every country in the world. People pray the rosary in Chinese, Swahili,

Portuguese, Russian and hundreds of other languages. Devotion to the rosary shapes our souls. It also inspires our actions. No matter where we live, it prompts us to put our faith into practice, and to do so in both good times and in bad. Whoever loves the Virgin Mary loves her Son, Jesus Christ. These bonds of love prepare us to live our faith in the public square.

Today we are hosting a Legislative Issues Seminar, and we are launching a little book with the title: “Catholics in the Public Square.” Why would a bishop write such a book?

Because there is a public square, and because Christ expects us to be active there: loving our neighbor, engaging the culture, promoting the common good, and defending the dignity and rights of all. This is part and parcel of being a follower of Christ.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus responds to a woman who declares how blest Mary is to be His mother. He says (Lk 11:28): **“Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”** The greater blessing, Jesus insists, is to hear and to act on God’s word, not just to treat it like a trophy on a shelf but to put it into practice in every dimension of one’s life.

But we live in a time when many contend that faith is a purely private matter. They accuse us of imposing our faith on others if we let it influence everything we do. From various

quarters, Catholics and other people of faith are especially pressured to separate our faith from the public square. But such pressures and contentions, if heeded, would make a mockery of faith. If our faith does not impact on every dimension of our life, then it is not true faith. It has become a mere pretense. As St. James writes in his New Testament Epistle (2:26), **“Faith without works is dead.”**

To hear the word of God but not to act on it is sheer hypocrisy. Our personal integrity is at stake. And so is the good of others. People of authentic faith make good citizens. They strengthen the spiritual and ethical fiber of their country. These are the kind of citizens that every nation needs.

This is why Christ tells His followers (Mt 5:14-16), **“You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all... Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”**

The need to act on our faith convictions is especially critical when the dignity and rights of persons are at stake. Concern about immigrants and the poor, questions of capital punishment and war—followers of Christ cannot refuse to engage these issues. We have a duty to do more than just feel bad when unborn children

have no legal protection from abortion or when the institution of marriage is threatened. We have a duty to stand strong against euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research.

Not all social issues are of equal importance, either. It is good to recall the words of our late Holy Father John Paul II who wrote, *“Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with the maximum determination (Christifideles laici, #38).”*

In a similar vein, Pope Benedict, in an address earlier this year to European Politicians, said, *“As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are not negotiable. Among these the following emerge clearly today:*

- *Protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death;*

- *Recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family – as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage.*

Why, then did I write this booklet “*Catholics in the Public Square?*” Why do we sponsor this legislative issues seminar? Because we want to encourage all our brothers and sisters in Church and in the larger society to live their faith 24-7, at home, in their place of work, in the public square.

Let us be well informed about the candidates and the key public issues, and then vote on the basis of a well-formed conscience. Know which issues are non-negotiables, that is, always and everywhere to be opposed. Be a faithful citizen of our country by being a faithful member of the Church.

In the rosary, we meditate on the joyful, luminous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries that unfolded in the life of Christ and His Blessed Mother. These meditations put us in tune with the mission of Christ, who is the Light of the world. They inspire us to treasure our friendship with Him, and to bring the light His Gospel into the public square.