

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 22, 2018
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

You have probably heard of "separation of Church and State." This doesn't come about naturally. Jesus is head of the Church, but he faced Herod and Pilate on the charge of blasphemy. In the first reading, Peter and John were arrested for "speaking to the people about the resurrection of Jesus." They were brought before the rulers, elders and scribes. They asked "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Proclamation does require authority to be legitimate, and authority has its source in God. So Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire in 380. Was this the will of God? It ended official persecution, but at a cost: the state became entangled with the Church. Over time, the emperor acquired the authority to appoint the pope and invest the bishops. This led to abuse. People would buy church offices, they would pay to become bishops; something called "simony." Once the Church decided to act, it took about fifty years for Gregorian reform to be accepted. The college of cardinals would elect the pope, and he would appoint the bishops. It wasn't an easy change; there were clashes between Church and state. For example, Pope Gregory VII excommunicated Henry IV, and removed him from the throne.

Acts 4:7-12
Ps 118
1 Jn 3:1-2
Jn 10:11-18

Henry eventually came to the pope to beg forgiveness. Bareheaded and barefooted, he first had to kneel in the snow for three days.

The question of Church and state still comes up. This past week, parliament considered a motion. It "asked" the bishops to "invite" Pope Francis to visit Canada. Then he could apologize for the role of the Catholic Church in the residential schools. Given the weather we've had, it was probably snowing when they attempted the motion.

I doubt they would have made Pope Francis kneel in it, but still, Fr. Raymond de Souza listed some objections.¹ First, parliament's attempt to have the bishops summon the Pope violates the separation of Church and state. Fr. de Souza writes, "it is quite simply not the business of the Parliament of Canada to tell the Catholic bishops of Canada what they should or should not do in their relations with the pope. It is a monstrous misunderstanding of the relationship between political power and civil society." Second, apologies have already been made. Pope Benedict apologized in 2009. This apology was accepted and was deemed to have "closed the book". Pope Francis then apologized in 2015 to all the indigenous peoples of the Americas. He said sorry for the grave sins of colonialism...of which the residential schools were a manifestation.

¹ <https://www.convivium.ca/articles/wrong-way-charlie>

Asking him to repeat an apology undermines past reconciliation, and replaces it with untruth: that the Church doesn't care.

And the Church does care. She follows Jesus, "the good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep." Indigenous peoples received education and were nourished in faith at schools run by the churches; trying work requiring great sacrifice; trying work done out of love. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." We follow the shepherd, who leads the flock to the still waters of faith, where they can receive the love of God. Jesus said, "I have other sheep that do not belong this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." These words inspire the missions, impelling those who are called to leave the comforts of home to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. My grandmother benefitted because her teachers responded to the call. She was Metis, and enjoyed her time at a school in Saskatchewan just before the First World War. She didn't recall abuses, but they did happen elsewhere...mostly at the residential schools set up by the federal government...with consequences that linger. Throwing money at the problem is not the solution. "The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep." Money does not heal. Jesus heals. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among human beings by which we must be saved."

For this Eucharist, we pray for our bishops with the pope at their head as they teach, sanctify and govern. We pray also for First Nations, that inspired by the psalm, they may persevere in the faith. "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."