

Fr. Luan Tran
Weekly Bulletin Notes
2023

January 1, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

According to Pope Benedict, our Catholic Tradition points us to a deeper meaning of the manger scene. The shepherds were told that they would find the child in a manger for animals, who were the rightful occupants of the stable. Reading Isaiah (1:3), the Fathers of the Church concluded that beside the manger of Bethlehem there stood an ox and an ass. At the same time, they understood the animals as representing the Jews and the pagans – and thus all humanity – who each in their own way have need of a Savior: the God who became a child. Man, in order to live, needs bread, the fruit of the earth and of his labor. But he does not live by bread alone. He needs nourishment for his soul: he needs meaning that can fill his life. Man needs the Word! Thus, for the Church's Fathers, the manger of the animals became the symbol of the altar, on which lies the Bread which is Christ the Word Himself: the true food for our hearts.

Thus, the manger is the altar, and the altar is the manger! Every day is Christmas, because every day we have the Mass - Christ's Mass! May we feel the deep desire to go the manger in which lies the Bread of our soul!

January 8, 2023: From Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's inaugural homely in 2005:

"The Church is alive – with these words, I greet with great joy and gratitude all of you gathered here, my venerable brother Cardinals and Bishops, my dear priests, deacons, Church workers, catechists. I greet you, men and women Religious, witnesses of the transfiguring presence of God. I greet you, members of the lay faithful, immersed in the great task of building up the Kingdom of God which spreads throughout the world, in every area of life. With great affection I also greet all those who have been reborn in the sacrament of Baptism but are not yet in full communion with us; and you, my brothers and sisters of the Jewish people, to whom we are joined by a great shared spiritual heritage, one rooted in God's irrevocable promises. Finally, like a wave gathering force, my thoughts go out to all men and women of today, to believers and non-believers alike.

Dear friends! At this moment there is no need for me to present a programme of governance. I was able to give an indication of what I see as my task in my Message of Wednesday 20 April, and there will be other opportunities to do so. My real programme of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.

At this point, my mind goes back to 22 October 1978, when Pope John Paul II began his ministry here in Saint Peter's Square. His words on that occasion constantly echo in my ears: "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ!" The Pope was addressing the mighty, the powerful of this world, who feared that Christ might take away something of their power if they were to let him in, if they were to allow the faith to be free. Yes, he would certainly have

taken something away from them: the dominion of corruption, the manipulation of law and the freedom to do as they pleased. But he would not have taken away anything that pertains to human freedom or dignity, or to the building of a just society. The Pope was also speaking to everyone, especially the young. Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? And once again the Pope said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen." Requiescat in Pace!

January 15, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Last Sunday was Epiphany, a very significant event for us Christians! To me, every day is Epiphany, every day is Christmas! God is always close to us, and He makes sure we know He is right with us in the moments of need! He is with us even if we don't ask for His help. He is with us even when we don't expressly desire to see His Face. But the longing for us is not something that comes and goes at our beckoning. The longing for God is written in our spiritual DNA!

That is why the story of the three Kings is so dear to my heart! The Magi thus personify all those who believe, those who long for God, who yearn for their home, their heavenly homeland. A holy longing for God wells up in the heart of believers because they know that they had been made for a lot more than this world could offer. A holy longing for God helps us keep alert lest we succumb to attempts to reduce and impoverish our life. A holy longing for God is the memory of faith, which rebels before all prophets of doom. That longing keeps hope alive in the community of believers, which from moment to moment never stops pleading: "Come, Lord Jesus".

This same longing led the elderly Simeon to go up each day to the Temple, certain that his life would not end before he had held the Savior in his arms. This longing led the Prodigal Son to abandon his self-destructive lifestyle and to seek his father's forgiveness. This longing was in the heart of Zacchaeus when he climbed that sycamore tree hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Mary Magdalen experienced the same longing on that Sunday morning when she ran to the tomb and met her risen Master.

Longing for God saves us for it draws us out of our rigid self-imposed isolation. Longing for God leads us beyond all the things that deceive us into thinking that nothing can change. Longing for God shatters our numbing routines and impels us to make the changes we want and need. Longing for God is rooted in our memory and it reaches out to the future. Believers who feel this longing are led by faith to seek God, as the Magi did, for they know that there the Lord awaits them. They know they are beggars who beg to see the face of God even more concretely.

January 22, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Father Daniel Mode, the chief Chaplain of the US Coast Guard wrote a book about a magnificent shepherd in the field who became the lamb of sacrifice for his sheep: the Grunt Padre, a Marine chaplain who made the ultimate sacrifice in a rice field of South Vietnam. Below is a summary by the author that I came across this week.

It was Labor Day in the United States on September 4, 1967. In the States, people were running about the beaches and enjoying the last summer barbecues before school began. But on the other side of the world, in Vietnam, war was raging on. On that Labor Day, Father Vincent Capodanno, a Maryknoll priest and military chaplain, found himself 50 miles to the southwest of Da Nang with the 3rd Battalion 5th Marines. Early that morning a platoon of men of that battalion was on a typical search and destroy mission when they encountered a regiment of 2,500 North Vietnamese regulars in a major offensive. The platoon was quickly over-run and the 3rd battalion 5th Marines began pouring units into the battle that would be known as Operation Swift.

Father Capodanno was with M company when it was ordered to go to a battalion aid station quickly being set up for the wounded and the dying. While Father Capodanno didn't have to go, he hopped aboard a helicopter with some of the M company Marines. They didn't make it. Their chopper was shot down in the midst of rice fields close to the battlefield. Father Capodanno and his men evacuated the chopper and set up a command post on a small knoll, on the edge of the battlefield where fierce fighting was going on. He could hear the gunfire and he heard another M company radio operator calling back to the command post: "We've been overrun. We can't hold out." Having been in Vietnam for 16 months and served in eight major, he knew where his men needed him most, and he knew where his sacraments were needed most.

He dashed over the hill, found that radio operator, grabbed him by the shoulder and brought him back to relative safety. Time and again throughout that late morning and early afternoon Father Capodanno would do the same thing with the wounded and dying. His first wound of the day was a shot through his right hand disabling his fingers. He was bandaged but returned on the next medevac. "I need to be where my Marines need me most," he said. Choking in the midst of tear gas, Father Capodanno—who had given his gas mask to a young Marine without one—got his second wound from a mortar shell, disabling his whole right arm and shoulder. Again, he was bandaged up and again refused to evacuate.

A short time later, Father Capodanno ran to aid a wounded Marine named Lawrence David Peters, who was dying but had propped himself up against a tree stump, exposed to enemy fire, so he could point out where the machine guns were on the adjacent ridge. No one dared go near Sergeant Peters—except Father Capodanno, who ran to the dying man's side despite the bullets, despite his own wounds, to pray with the Marine and to care for him in his last hours of life. Sergeant Peters would receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his heroism that day.

The last moments of Father Capodanno's own life took place near an enemy machine gun nest that three Marines were trying to take out. All three men were cut down, two killed instantly and a third, Ray Harton, was shot through his left shoulder. A corpsman went to his aid but was quickly shot through both legs. As both men lay bleeding on the battlefield, Father Capodanno ran to them. First, he went to Harton, who had served the priest's Mass the day before, anointed him and said, "Stay calm, Marine, God is with us

all today and you're going to be OK." Then he ran to the side of the corpsman, or medic, with his legs shot up—who was also a Catholic—and prayed over him. As he prayed, Father Capodanno was shot 27 times in the back.

Born on February 13, 1929, Father Capodanno grew up in a typical Italian American family in Staten Island, N.Y., the youngest of 10 children. He went to Fordham University in the Bronx and was debating his future, maybe a doctor, maybe a businessman. Riding the Staten Island Ferry every morning to go to school, he would read *The Field Afar*, now *Maryknoll* magazine. He had read all the stories of Catholic priests and bishops in places like China and Korea and Japan and how they were ministering to people in far-flung places that needed Christ. His heart was moved, and he became a *Maryknoll* missionary, and was assigned to Taiwan after his ordination in 1958. Later on, they moved him to a private boy's school in Hong Kong. He didn't like that. It wasn't the rugged life; it wasn't a challenge for him. The Vietnam War was escalating, and he asked his *Maryknoll* superiors to let him become a military chaplain. Ultimately, he was sent to Vietnam and served with the 7th Marines and then with the 3rd battalion 5th Marines before that fateful September 4.

The Marines whom Father Capodanno served as chaplain in Vietnam considered him one of their own. When they had to hike, he hiked with them; when they carried 40 pounds on their back, he carried 40 pounds on his back; when they sweated in the heat, he sweated in the heat; and when they had to stay up at night on a listening post, he stayed up at night. They dubbed him "the Grunt Padre," a grunt being an affectionate term for Marines in the trenches.

A humble man who cared for his Marines unto his own death, Father Capodanno was a hero of the faith even before he made the ultimate sacrifice. Chaplains in Vietnam usually served a year. After his 12 months, Father Capodanno requested an extension and got another six months. Then he requested yet another extension and was awaiting a reply. The letter denying his additional extension arrived only after his death.

Father Daniel Mode also met so many other veterans who never knew Father Capodanno but were touched by his story and helped through their alcoholism or depression and kept from committing suicide. From heaven, Father Capodanno is still working to save his marines!

January 29, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Christ is always calling us! He never stops calling us. He calls us for our sake. He calls us continually. He calls us in the middle of everything. He calls us even after we have told Him we are too busy for Him. He calls us in the events and happenings and in the people whom we encounter on our path. He calls us at this very moment because the time is running short, because it's urgent, because we need to hear Him and see Him. And it is precisely in the midst of everything that we do and conduct our life that we respond to Him. And when we respond, He always stays right there at our side. His Body and His Blood we receive in Holy Communion are not just the pledge of future glory, they are His graces given to us here and now so we could stay with Him, and He with us. Blessed Miguel Pro was executed by a firing squad during the Mexican war against the Church when he was 28. Blessed Rosario Livatino died when he was 37 - killed by the Mafia in Sicily in 1990. Pope Benedict died at a ripe old age at 95. Cardinal George Pell

of Sydney, Australia died unexpectedly of a heart attack following hip surgery at 81. And a French nun, Sr. Andre, died two weeks ago at 118 – she was the oldest living person! This life is a drama – long or short. The call of Christ in the Gospel appears simple enough but within it is packed an amazing drama. There are two protagonists: Christ and I, both of whom are beggars. Christ begs for my love, and I for Him. If we live this drama with full attention, it shall not be pointless.

February 5, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

My dear people, this Sunday is the feast of our Patron Saint. I will speak of her amazing story in my homily. For now, please pray for all those suffering from breast cancer. Below is a traditional prayer to St. Agatha for this intention that I have found from CNA website.

St. Agatha, woman of valor, from your own suffering we have been moved to ask your prayers for those of us who suffer from breast cancer. We place these names before you, and ask you to intercede on their behalf. From where you stand in the health of life eternal — all wounds healed, and all tears wiped away — pray for (mention your request) , and all of us. Pray God will give us His holy benediction of health and healing. And, we remember you were a victim of torture and that you learned, first hand, of human cruelty and inhumanity. We ask you to pray for our entire world. Ask God to enlighten us with a “genius for peace and understanding.” Ask Him to send us His Spirit of Serenity, and ask Him to help us share that peace with all we meet. From what you learned from your own path of pain, ask God to give us the Grace we need to remain holy in difficulties, not allowing our anger or our bitterness to overtake us. Pray that we will be more peaceful and more charitable. And from your holy place in our mystical body, the Church, pray that we, in our place and time will, together, create a world of justice and peace. Amen.

February 19, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.

For members of the Latin Catholic Church, the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards. Members of the Eastern Catholic Churches are to observe the particular law of their own sui iuris Church. If possible, the fast on Good Friday is continued until the Easter Vigil (on Holy Saturday night) as the “paschal fast” to honor the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus and to prepare ourselves to share more fully and to celebrate more readily his Resurrection.

For those who desire it, Archbishop Sample has granted a dispensation from the obligation of abstinence on Friday, March 17, 2023, the optional memorial of St. Patrick.

February 26, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

On the night of September 6, 2018, 26-year-old accountant Botham Jean was killed when off-duty police officer Amber Guyger entered his apartment in Dallas, Texas and fatally shot him. Guyger later testified that she had entered Jean's apartment after a 13.5 hour day – exhausted and tired. And so she ended up in a wrong apartment – Botham Jean's apartment. When she entered the apartment, believing it was her own, she saw a black man in the living room and she panicked, thinking him a burglar. She drew her gun and shot him and killed him on the spot. At the trial, a miracle of grace happened! During the course of victim impact statements, the deceased's brother, Brandt Jean, told Guyger and the court:

"If you truly are sorry, I know I can speak for myself, I forgive you. I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you. . . . [A]gain I'm speaking for myself... but I love you just like anyone else. And I'm not gonna say I hope you rot and die just like my brother did, but I presently want the best for you. And I wasn't going to ever say this in front of my family or anyone, but I don't even want you to go to jail. I want the best for you, because I know that's exactly what Botham would want you to do. And the best would be to give your life to Christ. I'm not going to say anything else. I think giving your life to Christ would be the best thing that Botham would want you to do. Again, I love you as a person and I don't wish anything bad on you. I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug, please? Please?"

Following the emotional statement, Brandt requested an opportunity to hug Guyger, which he was granted by Judge Tammy Kemp.

At the end of the film *Schindler's List*, during the emotional scene in which Schindler was sobbing because he had just realized that if he had not lived so extravagantly, he could have saved more of the prisoners. At that very point, an old man approached him and said, "You have saved many of us. And the Talmud teaches that whoever saves one life, saves the world entire!"

Look around us now and see how our cities, our neighborhoods, our streets are filled with people who live by "don't get mad, get even!" Our Lord in today's Gospel tells us the Christian response to people who get on our nerves: "don't get mad, get praying and forgiving!" In today's on-edge, thin-skinned, rudderless society, that is a tall order. It's not something we can accomplish overnight. But that where confession comes in! With the grace from Confession and the Holy Mass and prayers, we can do this! It is impossible to do what Schindler did. It is impossible for most of us to go off to poor places in the way Mother Teresa had come to India and saved the lepers from the slums of Calcutta. It is highly unlikely that we could repeat the sacrifice St. Maximilian Kolbe who offered his life in exchange for the life of a father of eight children. And yet, we can be like all of them! We can be like Schindler, Mother Teresa, St. Maximilian Kolbe. We can be like them in saving the world entire by saving one life this Lent. We all have enemies and detractors and opponents and foes – those who hate us, or cannot tolerate us, or disparage us, and those whom we have hurt or injured. This Lent, let's save one life from the prison of our hatred by our heart-felt merciful forgiveness, by letting that one person go – unbound, unshackled, unchained, unfettered!

March 5, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

In the gospels Christ often repeats the words "Do not be afraid."

There must be a reason for this. It's because when we put our faith in God, we're afraid we will be losing control. But Abraham gave up control. He allowed God to direct his life, and that brought peace. How do we surrender our lives over to God? How do we surrender ourselves into God's hands in order to have peace? Here's one simple way. Pray Psalm 23! It goes like this:

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,
Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.
Beside still waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for the sake of His name.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.
You set a table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil, my
cup overflows.
Indeed, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord for years to come.*

And here is another way: the Surrender Prayer! It goes like this:

Jesus, I surrender myself to Thee. Take care of everything!

Try it! You will be amazed!

March 12, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

On the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, 25 January 2023, Archbishop Sample issued a document to clarify the teaching of the Catholic Church on the human person to help Catholics in the Archdiocese understand where the Church stands on the transgender theory and live the Faith accordingly in dealing with questions related to transgenderism. Here below is the introduction to the document. I will publish the entire document in this space in the next several weeks. You can find it online at www.archdpdx.org/gender. This is now the guidelines that will be the policy for St. Agatha's Parish and School.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!

It is with great joy and gratitude to Our Lord that I share this document to provide clarity on the Catholic Church's teaching on gender identity theory. I hope that you will find in these guidelines, as I do, the beauty of the Church's timeless teachings, the depth of God's love for us, and his desire for us to love one another, even amid what can be a confusing and complicated cultural reality.

I offer these guidelines as a teaching and formation resource and also as encouragement and hope for everyone working with those dealing with gender issues. May everyone who reads this document feel the love and compassion with which it was written and feel their hearts turned toward Our Lord Jesus Christ and

to his truth. Given on the 25th day of January, 2023, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. Most Reverend Alexander K. Sample Archbishop of Portland in Oregon

March 19, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

"Give me a drink", When He was saying this to the Samaritan woman, Christ was not pretending to be thirsty. He was really thirsty! But on a deeper level, Christ was thirsty for her soul, and the soul of every human being that has ever lived! And the woman, she has been coming to that well for years, taking care of her five husbands, and now this man, the sixth lover in her life! She continued to need water because she was always thirsty. But that physical thirst betrays a deeper thirst in her soul: the thirst for decency, for virtuousness, for respectability. And for much more than all that! We don't know much about her. But one thing for certain: she had lived a very morally tumultuous life, a sinful life. And now in front of Jesus, she felt the pangs of her conscience, the sorrows of her soul and the disappointments of her life more acutely than ever! But deeper than her obvious moral wounds, she felt her insufficiency, her lack, her deficits, her wants, her deficiency, her brokenness, even more keenly and intensely in front of Him, whom she intuited as the true source of the happiness she had been craving all her life and had proved elusive. All her life she was looking for love in all the wrong places. But the fact is: she never stopped looking, she never stopped trying to find satisfaction. She was relentlessly searching for what makes for a full life. That is why on that day, the woman by the well said without hesitation: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

March 26, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Here is the first installment of the Archbishop's teaching document on gender identity theory. He starts out with the teaching about the human person from the Book of Genesis in the Bible.

I. The Truth and Dignity of the Human Person

The first chapters of Genesis in sacred scripture provide the foundation for a Catholic anthropology—the Catholic understanding of the human person. According to our faith, human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). We are set apart from the rest of creation because we uniquely “are called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life.”⁴ This is our ultimate purpose, our supreme vocation.

Genesis also conveys, through figurative language, that every human being is a unity of body and soul. In the human person, “spirit and matter ... are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”⁵ Our embodied existence, “whole and entire,” is willed by God, and our bodies share in the dignity of being created in God’s image.⁶

One aspect of our embodied existence is sexual difference: maleness and femaleness.⁷ Because of the profound unity of body and soul, one’s nature as a man or a woman is rooted in sexed embodiment. This feature of our humanity is the crowning flourish of God’s creative work in Genesis:

“‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator.

Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity 'in the image of God.' In their 'being-man' and 'being-woman,' they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness."⁸

Sexual difference has profound significance for our earthly life; it is only through the union of male and female that new human beings come into existence. Yet sexual difference also carries profound spiritual meaning. Maleness and femaleness signal our capacity for an interpersonal communion that is life-giving; this reflects, or "images," God's Trinitarian nature. God himself is an interpersonal communion and the generative fount of all life. Sexual difference is thus one way that God reveals himself to us and through us.

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St. John Paul II's reflections on sacred scripture, known as *The Theology of the Body*, offer profound meditations on the dignity and meaning of the human body. It is only through the body that the hidden spiritual reality of a human person is made manifest; the body reveals the person. This endows the human body with an important sacramental function, making visible what would otherwise remain unseen.

The dignity and spiritual significance of human embodiment is integral to all the central mysteries of the Christian faith: the Incarnation of Christ, wherein the divine Word takes on a human nature; the Crucifixion, wherein Christ offers his body as a sacrifice of love for all; the Resurrection, wherein Christ rises bodily from death and ascends to the Father; the Eucharist, wherein Christ's body and blood are presented anew at the altar for us to partake; and the coming resurrection of the dead, wherein we, too, will have our full nature—body and soul—restored and perfected. (To be continued)

April 2, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Archbishop's teaching document on Gender Identity Theory (*continued from last week's article*)

II. Gender Identity Theory

The Catholic understanding of the human person is at odds with "gender identity theory," a framework that is increasingly dominant in Western culture. According to this model, one's identity as a man, woman, or both/ neither is based solely on subjective self-perception. The term 'transgender' has entered common usage by those who advocate gender identity theory. This theory separates "gender" (man-ness and woman-ness and the masculine and feminine principles found in nature itself) from biological sex, rooting sexed identity in a dissociated self-perception rather than the body. In cases of a felt incongruence between gender identity and sex, this model affirms the subjective sense of gender over the objective fact of biological sex and recommends the process of "transitioning" to identify as one's chosen, rather than given, sex.

The process of transition can take numerous forms, but the standard framework delineates four stages of "gender affirming care" (GAC) for young people: social transition, puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and surgeries.¹⁰ Social transition includes adopting the name, pronouns, facilities use, clothing, and appearance that align with the subjective sense of

gender. Puberty blockers, cross- sex hormones, and surgeries are all aspects of medical transition.

To some, supporting aspects of social transition may seem benign, even humane, such as using someone's preferred pronouns and actively affirming his or her perceived gender. However, while well-intentioned, this kind of endorsement may help shepherd a young person on a path of unnecessary medicalization. Social transition is often the first step toward hormones and surgery. A 2020 survey of transgender and nonbinary youth found that 64% of respondents were either already receiving cross-sex hormones or desired to do so.¹¹ Danish researchers who first used puberty blockers on gender dysphoric children found that social transition increased the likelihood that dysphoria would persist and result in medicalization.¹² Social transition can also include practices such as breast-binding and genital tucking, both of which have been shown to have adverse effects on physical health, like testicular torsion and reduced fertility in males, and abnormal lung function and back pain in females.¹³ Moreover, a 2020 study on the effects of social transition found that family and peer relations, but not social transition status, predicted psychological functioning.¹⁴ In other words, providing young people with love and social support need not be equated with endorsing the GAC model.

The process of medical transition for young people with gender incongruence often begins with puberty blockers that disrupt the process of sexual maturation. The purpose of this procedure is to halt the body's natural course of masculinization or feminization to facilitate subsequent cosmetic changes that can better approximate the appearance of the opposite sex. These changes most often involve taking cross-sex hormones and can also include surgeries that remove reproductive organs and alter genitalia. It is important to emphasize that the desired effect of these procedures is cosmetic; they do not treat a clearly identified physiological condition. Because of this, medical transition, which can lead to permanent sterility and ongoing harm to the body, is incompatible with Catholic medical ethics as well as Catholic anthropology. (To be continued after Easter Sunday)

April 9, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Let me offer you my Easter greetings with these profound words from Pope Benedict XVI, who passed away this year.

"I am now facing the last chapter of my life and I do not know what awaits me. I know, however, that the light of God exists, that he is Risen, that his light is stronger than any darkness, that the goodness of God is stronger than any evil in this world."

That is precisely why we must be joyful - even in these insane times! May the risen Lord bless you all abundantly!

April 16, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

(Continued from Archbishop Sample's teaching document on Gender Identity Theory)

IV. Whole-Person Affirmation: A Catholic Response

A response to gender identity theory that is both truthful and loving cannot end with simply stating what Catholic institutions won't do. Catholics must also articulate what we will do by offering a positive vision of the human person and a path of accompaniment for gender-questioning youth and their families.

A Catholic approach should offer whole-person affirmation, rather than restricting affirmation to a subjective sense of gender identity. This means affirming the entire person: body and soul. Whole-person affirmation begins by affirming the belovedness of every person. The first and most important truth that each young person needs to hear is this: you are infinitely loved. You are a living, breathing icon of God, and in this very moment, God is willing your existence, because he delights in you.

Whole-person affirmation also affirms the goodness and sacramentality of the body. Our body reveals our personhood. This is not something we need to force the body to do; the body is always doing it. Nonetheless, a positive view of embodiment also acknowledges its burdens. Being a body is difficult and painful at times; the limits and vulnerabilities of being a body reveal our interdependence on one another and ultimately our dependence upon God, and our need for his healing.

In our fallen world, we all experience a sense of disintegration, inner tensions between our reason, our will, and our desires. Sometimes we can experience our human condition as a living contradiction. Nevertheless, the Christian revelation shows us that the resolution to this often painful dilemma cannot be achieved through externalizing, projecting or “acting-out” those antinomies and disharmonies, but rather through arduous inner work and relying on the grace of God. Some people can also experience deep disharmony with their bodies, or a sense of incongruence with their sex. The experience of sex incongruence or dysphoria is not itself sinful, just as concupiscence itself is not a sin.²¹ Those who experience gender dysphoria should not be judged, rejected, or ignored, but met with compassion.

Whole-person affirmation also affirms the uniqueness of the individual. Every human person is a masterpiece of the Creator. There is no one “right way” to be a boy or girl, a man or a woman. While each person participates in the reality of sexual difference, each individual is unique. Young people need to be given positive and diverse models of manhood and womanhood, and encouraged to discern and develop their distinct gifts and singular personalities. The Catholic tradition is rich with saints and exemplars who lived out the vocation to love in myriad ways, and some of them did not conform with the gender stereotypes and norms of their time. Gender identity theory can at times reinforce restrictive gender stereotypes by claiming that a gender-atypical child is actually the opposite sex. Because the Catholic worldview affirms that gender—one’s identity as man or woman—is grounded in the sexed body, rather than cultural stereotypes that are currently in vogue, there is great freedom and diversity in how masculinity and femininity are lived out in the world.

Whole-person affirmation also affirms the need for accompaniment. Accompaniment is a commitment to walk alongside someone, an ongoing process of being-with. To accompany is to say with both word and action: “I will be with you in this process of discernment and discovery, which may involve disagreement, because I care about your ultimate good.” Pope Francis describes the art of accompaniment in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*. Accompaniment is a pilgrimage, a “journey with Christ to the Father,” not a “sort of therapy supporting [someone’s] self-absorption.”²² Accompaniment is characterized by the “art of listening,” listening that is “respectful and compassionate.”²³ Accompaniment requires great patience and “docility to the Spirit,” as well as humility—an awareness of our own limits—and reverence for the ultimate mystery within each person that only God can fully know.²⁴

We are given a model of accompaniment in sacred scripture at the end of the gospel of Luke, when Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He begins by meeting them where they are—in this case, fleeing Jerusalem, full of angst and fear. He asks them questions; he

seeks to understand what they are thinking and feeling. He listens. He does not impose upon them; in fact, he waits for an invitation to stay with them. He discloses the truth gradually, tactically—but he does teach them the truth; he leads them into deeper knowledge of himself. The journey they are walking has an ultimate destination, and in the end, the disciples return to Jerusalem in joyful worship, set free from fear.

Gender identity theory and gender affirming care offer a simplistic and a psychologically regressive response to a person in distress. GAC is neither patient nor inquisitive, but quick to impose a one-size-fits-all framework that obscures comorbid conditions, complex circumstances, and the developmental process of adolescent identity formation.²⁵ Any therapeutic approach that does not address the whole person, body and soul, cannot lead to human flourishing and conflicts with the Catholic faith.

In this time of great confusion about gender, Catholic institutions must respond not with reactionary fear or unthinking compliance, but with whole-person affirmation of each beloved person entrusted to their care.

(To be continued)

April 23, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,
(A reprint of Father Luan's bulletin note from 2022)

We all want peace and security. The Gospel tells us: there is only the one security that is truly necessary: the security of believing in God and loving Him to the point of trusting Him in everything, to the point of entrusting to Him everything, and to the point of being confident that, no matter how bad things could get, we always have our final refuge in Him.

It is not the easiest to do: to just hand over our life to God and say to Him, Here is my life, just take it! The tendency is ever strong in us to take care of ourselves and to take care of our own. We plan for our future. We provide for our family's needs. We use our strength, our intelligence, our experiences, to secure a little corner of the world that we have carved out for ourselves and our loved ones. We are not likely to give all that up to God or to someone else. But today Christ is calling us to something more. He wants our trust. And once you and I have handed over our lives to God, once we have transferred our security over to Him, we will experience a kind of peace that we have never had. And life will not be impoverished, but abundantly rich. How do I know this, being a man of weak faith myself? It's because the saints have told me so.

This following story was told by Fr. Langford, the cofounder of the priestly branch of the Missionary of Charity:

One day in the mother house in Calcutta there were about three hundred novices and they were all out for the morning. One of the novices working in the kitchen came up to Mother Teresa and said, "We've planned poorly; we have no flour to back these chipaties for lunch." Chipaties are little flour and water pancakes. The situation looked bleak—three hundred plus mouths are coming to be fed in about an hour and a half and there's nothing to cook with. There's no food.

"What I would expect Mother Teresa to do," Fr. Langford explained, "was that Mother would pick up the telephone and call some of her benefactors and mobilize them to find some way to feed her novices." Instead, her reaction—her spontaneous reaction—was to say to this little one, 'Sister, you're in charge of the kitchen this week? Well then, go

into the chapel and tell Jesus we have no food. That's settled. Now let's move on. What's next?"

Lo and behold, ten minutes later there was a ring at the door and Mother Teresa was called downstairs. A man she had never seen before was standing there with a clipboard. He addressed her saying "Mother Teresa, we were just informed that the teachers at the city schools are going on strike. Classes have been dismissed and we have 7,000 lunches we don't know what to do with. Can you help us use them?"

Food security, job security, personal security, border security: whatever security we clamor for, there only one that is necessary – the security of faith.

April 30, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

Life is unfair. Get used to it! Haven't we heard that before? Is that possible? Can we just suck it up and move on – it is what it is and there is not a thing we could do about life. Children, especially, are very quick to recognize an instance of unfairness, and they are always quick to call out the perpetrators. Certainly, people can put up with the unfairness of life, but only to a degree, then life could become intolerable, even hellish. Take the case of a mother whose daughter was murdered by an over-jealous boyfriend, who went scot-free because the police mishandled the evidence. What for her to do once her lawyer had exhausted all possible venues of appeal? Countless victims of injustice went to their graves without any possibility that society could ever make redress on their behalf of all the moral outrages. And so, for a thoughtful person, the question of God is ultimately linked to the question of justice. If God did not exist, true justice would be impossible, wicked people would never be held accountable, and innocent victims would never have their day in court – either in this life or the next. If God did not exist, evil would certainly have the last laugh!

Now, what if life is unfair, but on an entirely different level: when we cannot pin our suffering on anyone, when bad things happen to good people without rhyme or reason, when we cannot name the perpetrator? What to do when we suffer as a result of sheer bad luck - being in the wrong place at the wrong time, inheriting bad genes, and the likes. What to do when life has decided against us randomly? Is it always possible to make lemonade when life gives you a lemon? What if life hands you not a lemon, but scorpions and rattlesnakes?

For Christian believers, the existence of God means, among other things, that justice will have the last say – regardless of how the court of earthly justice has adjudicated. A true Christian believer will not allow the unfairness of life to defeat him and embitter him and turn him into a pathetic victim. For a true Christian who loves God and lives on the graces of the Resurrection, life makes sense regardless of how meaningless it might have all been. Thus, he can put up with an unjust and unfair world without ever giving up on life, giving up on mercy, on forgiveness, on hope, without ever capitulating to resentment, despair, vengeance. Cardinal George Pell of Sydney spent more than 400 days in solitary confinement having been convicted wrongfully of molesting a child by the court system of the State of Victoria. After the Supreme Court of Australia finally overturned his conviction unanimously and freed him, the Cardinal was never heard uttering even a single word of hatred toward the prosecutors and the judges and his accusers.

For a godless atheist, there should only be one obvious solution for pointless suffering. But for a faithful Catholic, an entire horizon of possibilities opens up! When bad things happen to good people, the secular world has no answer for it – "It is what it is! Just suck it up!" But

a believing Christian would refuse to just suck it up! He would argue and bargain and negotiate with God until he is satisfied that he has been heard. And it's a beautiful thing to behold, because, you know, for him, God is real – as real as the day is long. Life is unfair, unjust, and unreasonable. But God is in charge, and so I am going to wrestle with God! (To be continued next week)

May 7, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

We have been talking about the problem of injustice in a broken world. For a godless atheist, there should only one obvious solution for pointless suffering. But for a faithful Catholic, an entire horizon of possibilities opens up! When bad things happen to good people, the secular world has no answer for it – “It is what it is! Just suck it up!” But a believing Christian would refuse to just suck it up! He would argue and bargain and negotiate with God until he is satisfied that he has been heard. And it's a beautiful thing to behold, because, you know, for him, God is real – as real as the day is long. Life is unfair, unjust, and unreasonable. But God is in charge, and so I am going to wrestle with God! That's how a Mr. Arek Szura, a Polish immigrant who lives in the Richmond district of Philadelphia, dealt with God. I am going to share his amazing story with you - a story I read from the website Aleteia recently. His family and he belong to St. John Paul II parish there. One day, his critically ill son Adrian, 7, went into cardiac arrest in October 2022. Faced with the unprecedented calamity, this son of Poland did not curse God and wished to die. Neither did he climb on the roof of his house and cry to the whole world how life was so unfair to him and his family. Arek Szura made a promise to God: “If you let him walk out of this hospital, will walk from our house on my hands and knees to church to thank you.” Szura's wife, Izabela, told Catholic News Agency that the odds were almost completely against Arek ever fulfilling that pledge. The Szura family had learned in 6 months before that Adrian suffered from acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). While in treatment, Adrian had experienced “the rarest of rarest side effects” from his chemotherapy: His heart stopped for 30 minutes as doctors at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia worked to resuscitate him. Although the medical team revived him, the boy experienced a number of potentially fatal side effects from the cardiac arrest, she said. “His kidneys and liver were not working, and his body swelled with almost 25 pounds of fluid because his kidneys (were failing),” Izabela Szura said. The doctors also warned that Adrian might have sustained neurological damage from the heart failure, she said. Adrian had “only a 10% chance of survival.” But Izabela and her husband Arek Szura, along with their daughter Alexandra, 10, and a band of supporters known as “Adrian's Army,” refused to give up hope. Izabela Szura placed an icon of Mary and Jesus in Adrian's hands, along with a rosary. Slowly, dialysis removed the excess fluid from his body — 46 days after his cardiac arrest, Adrian was discharged from the hospital. A month later, Adrian was “in complete remission” with no signs of neurological impairment. Today, he is “running around like a crazy kid”.

On April 8, Arek Szura fulfilled his promise to God, donning work gloves and kneepads to shuffle and crawl the 10 blocks from his home to St. Adalbert Church, part of St. John Paul II Parish and home to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Polish Apostolate. During the 40-minute trek on his hands and knees, “I prayed to St. John Paul II, St. Rita and St. Charbel,” said Arek Szura. Ahead of his arrival at the church — which coincided with the traditional Holy Saturday blessing of Easter food — his wife, the mother of the miracle boy, phoned the priest, Father Jan Palkowski, alerting him of the thanksgiving pilgrimage. The old priest

literally broke down on the phone crying. He had been a priest for 47 years and had never seen anything like that. His whole family drove to catch up with Arek Szura as he neared the doors of the church, where Father Palkowski had his hands raised in blessing. Adrian “cried as he ran out” to meet his father. Arek Szura made his way up the church’s aisle and knelt before the crucifix that had been laid out for veneration during Good Friday services.

Let me leave you with some quotes from the Bible:

“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

May 14, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

With the Passion and Crucifixion, Christ has given us Himself, his friendship, his own life, that we can now have true peace of heart.

At the Last Supper He commanded his Apostles, “**Do not let your hearts be troubled.**”

Today, He is saying the same thing to us. “**Do not fear!**” If we stay close to him, what do we have to fear, what can trouble us? St Paul wrote: “**With God on our side, who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son... we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give...**” (Romans 8:31-33).

The whole universe is ours, because Christ is ours. Everything is at our fingertips, at our disposal, because we belong to Christ, because we have faith in Him. In the midst of troubles, temptations, sicknesses, failures, and even our sins, Christ is always by our side, loving, guiding, and upholding us. As we accept this truth, we begin to experience true peace of heart, the kind that doesn't depend on moods and circumstances, the kind that gives us the strength and joy of the martyrs, who sang hymns as they were burnt at the stake.

May the joys of Easter continue to keep our hearts glad!

May 21, 2023: My Dear Parishioners,

I came across these illuminating words from a homily by a priest a long time ago, and I would like to share with you:

"Ascension reveals the mystery of the Man-God. We know from where Jesus comes because we see where He is going: He comes from the Father and now He is returning to Him. What is the implication for us: our life is not hanging in thin air: God is our beginning and so He must also be our end. Ascending to the sky, Christ takes us into His heart and puts us in the heart of the Father.

Christ is the One who, in His incarnation, has united heaven and earth. He has joined together extremes: the poverty of man with the infinite riches of God, the lowly earth and the exalted heaven, the material and the spiritual. Heaven is not a place far away and above and beyond the most distant stars; it is something far more greater, it is where man can find his place in God. Christ is the man who is in God. At the same time Christ is the perpetual openness of God toward mankind. With the Ascension, we now know our true destiny."

“He himself is, therefore, what we call ‘heaven’, because heaven is not a space, but a person, the person of the one in whom God and man are forever inseparably united. And we get closer to the heaven, indeed we enter into heaven, in the measure in which we draw near to Jesus and enter into Him.” (*J. Ratzinger, Homily for Ascension 1975*)