

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
TUESDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
26TH WORKSHOP FOR BISHOPS (NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER),
FEBRUARY 7, 2017 - DALLAS, TEXAS

As the Holy Father's personal representative in the United States, I wish to express his spiritual closeness and prayers during this gathering addressing the theme of "Healing Persons in a Wounded Culture." It is providential that today's readings touch upon the themes of this conference. God's Word focuses on essential themes of the whole field of moral theology and bioethics: conversion of heart and integral human ecology.

In the Gospel, Jesus challenges the scribes and Pharisees, who are not unlike the casuists and manualists of the moral theology of previous centuries, who *nullified the Word of God* in favor of their own traditions. Jesus accuses them of honoring God *with their lips* but not seeking a more profound conversion of heart, *disregarding God's commandments but clinging to human tradition*. While the Scribes and Pharisees of His day (and our day) were scholarly and could rationally justify many practices, often they failed to show people the path that leads to freedom and life. Religious practice had become something purely formal, external to the person rather than an encounter with the living God whose love transforms the person. Religion had devolved into legalism and vain worship rather than a way of offering spiritual worship and adoration to God through virtuous living.

This is our task as pastors – not to explain away the Word of God or to replace it with human traditions or rationalizations – but to propose the Word of God as the path that leads to conversion of heart and true freedom. The Gospel is an invitation to examine our pastoral approach to see whether we have added extra burdens to our people or whether we have shown understanding and mercy, accompanying them in the way of truth. As pastors, while never nullifying the Word of God in favor of human traditions, it is important that we assist the flock, providing education and formation that truly helps them to keep the commandments. We propose the truth and then accompany the flock with gentleness and mercy in living that truth in love.

A second theme of today's Scriptural readings is the idea of integral human ecology. For just as the people of Jesus' day heard many interpretations of the Law, some very distorted, so too are the men and women of our day exposed to many different voices which obscure the vision of man and woman, beautifully described in Genesis. Perhaps, the greatest wound in the culture is forgetting the great dignity of man and woman in all of creation; men and women are told that the body is a 'thing' to be manipulated or used, rather than a gift to be cherished and nurtured. As the Psalmist says: *What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him? You have made him little less than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor.*

It is this dignified vision of man that must be re-proposed to the men and women of our day. The first Genesis account of creation affirms several truths: God is the author and sovereign of creation. His creation is good and that when He looked upon man and woman, *he found it very good*. Man and woman possess inherent dignity, based not on what they do or what they have, but based upon who they are – made in God's image, bearing the divine likeness. Man and woman complement one another and have been called by God to be stewards of the body, of life, and of creation. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes:

The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any human ecology. (ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LAUDATO SI*, 24 MAY 2015, N. 155)

What is happening today with the so-called gender ideology is no different from what Jesus lamented in the Gospel: the attempt to replace God and the Word of God with merely human constructs. It is this that your gathering will explore. It is no easy task to speak in this wounded culture about transgenderism or pornography addiction, yet it would not be pastoral to remain silent about the vision of man and woman proposed by Revelation. This is the Good News that men and women need to hear! Pastoral care of the family demands appreciating the different gifts of the Creator as the Holy Father says:

Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way, we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek 'to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.' (ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LAUDATO SI*, 24 MAY 2015, N. 155)

What you are doing here is truly pastoral! It is my prayer that the Spirit of God, who hovered over the waters at the dawn of creation and who descended upon the Apostles, gathered with the Virgin in the Upper Room, at Pentecost, may inspire and strengthen you as you support one another in your mission of guiding the flock on the path to encounter the God of all Creation – the God of Life.