

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
LOVE OF NEIGHBOR IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION:
RESPONSES TO NATIONALISM, WAR, AND POVERTY
SRI SIVA VISHNU TEMPLE, LANTHAM, MARYLAND
NOVEMBER 11, 2017**

I am delighted to be with you today. I thank Bishop Rozanski for his kind invitation and Bishop Madden for his gracious introduction. In a special way, I thank Mr. Sant Gupta, the organizer of this event, as well as Uma Potarazu for her words of welcome on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Sri Siva Vishnu Temple. I offer wishes of peace to our gracious hosts and to all gathered here, especially my counterpart, Swamini Svatmavidyananda. I hope that the discussion today will contribute to mutual understanding, respect, dialogue and peace, as the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue desired in its 2017 Message on the Occasion of Deepavali:

Grounded in our own spiritual traditions and in our shared concern for the unity and welfare of all people, may we Christians and Hindus ... encourage in our families and communities, and through our religious teachings and communications media, respect for every person, especially those in our midst whose cultures and beliefs are different from ours. In this way, we will move beyond tolerance to build a society that is harmonious and peaceful, where all are respected and encouraged to contribute to the unity of the human family by making their own unique contribution. (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Message on the Occasion of Deepavali, 19 October 2017)

I intend to outline the Catholic response to nationalism, war, and poverty within the context of the love of neighbor, acknowledging the limitations of our time today.

Human Dignity and the Love of Neighbor

I recognize that many may not be familiar with the Catholic or Christian tradition; therefore, I want to begin with a foundational principle: respect for the dignity of the human person. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, God is the creator. All that God has made is good, but the crown of creation is the human person, made in God's image and likeness. God made them male and female, setting the person over creation as a steward. Upon seeing his creation, God said that *it was very good*.

The human person, who bears the divine image, is a unity of body and soul; is endowed with an intellect to know what is good; and freedom to choose that which is good (or not). The human person is made for communion – that is, for union with God and others.

As such, the person is endowed with *inherent* dignity in virtue of being a person. One's dignity is not based on attributes such as beauty, intelligence, wealth, etc. Dignity is not based on what a person has or does, but on who the person *is* prior to doing anything at all.

Catholic teaching regarding respect for human life, as well as Catholic Social Doctrine, rests upon the dignity of the human person. This idea of dignity, rooted in human nature, is a philosophical and legal concept that can provide a foundation for fundamental rights and for dialogue among people of different faiths.

The Catholic tradition and scriptures affirm this principle by calling believers to love God and neighbor. Jesus teaches his followers that they must even love their enemies, but the call to

love one's neighbor has its starting point in the understanding of God. The Christian scriptures say that "*God is love.*" Christians believe that God is a community of love: three persons in one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While Judaism had many laws and commandments, they could be essentially consolidated into two: love of God and love of neighbor. The "commandment" to love God and neighbor is more than a mere obligation; truly love of God and neighbor should be a response to the experience of being first loved by God.

Three examples from the bible help identify our neighbor. The first is the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man has everything. Lazarus, a beggar, sits outside the rich man's door and longs for something to eat. He is covered with sores. While the dogs tend to Lazarus, the rich man does nothing to help him, refusing to recognize him as his brother and neighbor. Lazarus dies and is in peace; the rich man dies and suffers torment. The story illustrates what happens when we do not love our brothers and sisters, including the poor, or when we completely ignore them, refusing to acknowledge their dignity.

The second passage is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). After stating the two great commandments – to love God and neighbor – to test Jesus someone asks Him, "*But who is my neighbor?*" Jesus responds by telling a story about a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Each one sees a man, lying beaten, half-dead in the middle of the road. The first two pass by. The Samaritan stops. He pours oil on the man's wounds, bandages him, puts him on his own donkey, and takes him to the inn for his healing, leaving payment also for his care. He recognizes and shows that every man – even those I do not know – is my neighbor; as such, he treated him with compassion.

The third passage is the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), depicted in the Sistine Chapel. Here love becomes the criterion for salvation. How have we treated our brothers and sisters? Jesus identifies himself with those in need – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, and states: "*Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me.*" (Mt 25:40) Therefore, love of God and love neighbor become one.

The Christian scriptures also state: "*If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love the God whom he has not seen.*" (1 John 4:20). Christians believe that the invisible God became visible in Jesus, whom they can also know in the scriptures, in the community gathered in prayer, and in other ways, especially in the experience of being loved. Love is not merely a feeling; it is an experience that engages the whole person, body and soul, intellect, and will; it is a choice for the good of others. The love of neighbor flows from an intimate encounter with the living God.

Nationalism

The Christian message regarding love of neighbor has a universal appeal which helps us realize the unity of the human family, rooted in the unity of God who is a communion of love. Pope John XXIII wrote:

"The unity of the human family has always existed, because its members are human beings all equal by virtue of their natural dignity. Hence there will always exist the objective need to promote, in sufficient measure, the *universal* common good, which is the common good of the entire human family." (John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963)

In this context, we can discuss the issue of nationalism. The centrality of the human person and the natural inclination to form relationships leads men and women to establish nations to realize the unity of the human family. Each nation has its own distinctive characteristics and culture. The Catholic Church recognizes the importance of national sovereignty and culture, which constitutes the guarantee for the preservation of the identity of a people and expresses and promotes its *spiritual sovereignty*.

In addressing, the United Nations in 1995, Pope John Paul II distinguished a healthy patriotism from an unhealthy nationalism. He lamented the fact that some perceived difference and the reality of the “other” as a threat, leading to cycles of violence, obscuring the fundamental commonality that we share as persons. He said:

In this context, we need to clarify the essential difference between an unhealthy form of *nationalism*, which teaches contempt for other nations or cultures, and *patriotism*, which is a proper love of one's country. True patriotism never seeks to advance the well-being of one's own nation at the expense of others. For in the end this would harm one's own nation as well: doing wrong damages both aggressor and victim. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism, and today we must ensure that extreme nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of the aberrations of totalitarianism. This is a commitment which also holds true, obviously, in cases where religion itself is made the basis of nationalism, as unfortunately happens in certain manifestations of so-called “fundamentalism”. (John Paul II, Address to the United Nations, October 5, 1995)

This past March, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, Pope Francis addressed the issue of nationalism and its aggressive forms:

“Forms of populism are instead the fruit of an egotism that hems people in and prevents them from overcoming and “looking beyond” their own narrow vision. There is a need to start thinking ... to avert the opposite dangers of a dreary uniformity or *the triumph of particularisms*. Politics needs this kind of leadership, which avoids appealing to emotions to gain consent, but instead, in a spirit of solidarity and subsidiarity.” (Francis, Address to Heads of State on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, March 24, 2017)

The antidote to nationalism is solidarity, which “entails the awareness of being part of a single body, while at the same time involving a capacity on the part of each member to “sympathize” with others and with the whole.”

While the Church is supportive of patriotism and cultures, she rejects nationalism which is closed to other peoples and cultures, based on racial, ethnic and religious difference. As a remedy, she proposes a culture of encounter and solidarity which can serve as the basis of mutual enrichment.

War

One of the risks of extreme nationalism is war. Church teaching regarding war falls under the commandments - *You shall not kill* and *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. We began by speaking of human dignity. Human life is sacred because from the beginning it involves the creative action of God and remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator. (cf.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2258) No one has the right to directly destroy or take the life of an innocent human being.

Each person has a right to defend his or her life from an unjust aggressor. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "Love toward oneself remains a fundamental principle of morality. Therefore, it is legitimate to insist on respect for one's own right to life. Someone who defends his life is not guilty of murder, even if he is forced to deal his aggressor a lethal blow." (CCC, 2264) However, one may not use more force than necessary to defend one's life.

One not only has the right to self-defense, but at times, one may have the duty to defend the lives of those for whom one is responsible. In his 1948 Christmas message, Pope Pius XII said, "Among the goods of humanity, some are of such importance for society that it is perfectly lawful to defend them against unjust aggression. Their defense is even an obligation for the nations as a whole who have a duty not to abandon a nation that is attacked." (cf. CCC, 2265)

When force is used, it is used to protect and defend life and the common good. The Church obliges all citizens and governments to work for the avoidance of war (CCC 2308). Still, peace is not the mere absence of war; rather, it is "the work of justice and the fruit of charity." Within the Catholic tradition, strict criteria were developed over time for the use of force – the so-called "just war" theory. (cf. CCC, 2309)

At one and the same time, the following must be met for the use of force to be considered legitimate defense:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

Even when these conditions exist, not every military action is legitimate. The Church teaches that non-combatants, wounded soldiers and prisoners must be respected and treated humanely and that "Actions deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes, as are the orders that command such actions. Blind obedience does not suffice to excuse those who carry them out. Thus, the extermination of a people, nation, or ethnic minority must be condemned as a mortal sin. One is morally bound to resist orders that command genocide." (cf. CCC, 2313)

Furthermore, the *Catechism* (2314) teaches:

Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation." A danger of modern warfare is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern scientific weapons especially atomic, biological, or chemical weapons - to commit such crimes.

With the continuing evolution of warfare and weaponry, some have suggested that the just war theory is obsolete. This year, on the occasion of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace, Pope Francis issued a message, entitled, “Nonviolence: a Style of Politics for Peace.”

Acknowledging the wars of the last century, the Pope suggests that presently we are engaged in a “horrifying war fought piecemeal”, through conventional wars, acts of terrorism, organized crime, abuse of migrants, human trafficking and environmental destruction. Experience teaches that violence is not the cure for brokenness of this world. At best, violence leads to forced migrations, suffering, and waste of precious resources; at worst, it leads to death - physical and spiritual.

There are numerous examples of nonviolence, yielding impressive results in the promotion of peace, by Christians and non-Christians. One recalls the marvelous example offered by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr and others. In the last century, the fall of Communism and the peaceful transition that followed occurred largely without the use of violence but through the “weapons” of truth and justice.

The true battlefield, where violence and peace are engaged, is the human heart. Nonviolence and peace are not passive but active. Jesus preached unconditional love, even of enemies, which constitutes the *Magna Carta* of Christian nonviolence. Pope Francis suggests that violence and injustice must be countered with more love and more goodness. This active nonviolence is more than a mere political strategy; it is a way of life, found in many religious traditions. It must be practiced within families *and* within the human family. The way of life in this human family cannot be based on the logic of fear and violence but rather must be rooted in responsibility, respect and dialogue.

In addition to calling for disarmament, the Holy Father also calls for an end to domestic violence and the abuse of women and children. He exhorts world leaders to limit the use of force, favoring peace-building through active nonviolence. Pope Francis offered political and religious leaders, heads of international institutions and business and media executives, a challenge: to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their responsibilities. In this way, they will act truly as peacemakers. To this end, the Holy Father pledged the assistance of the Church “in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.”

Finally, since we have a common home, we have a common task: “Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace.”

Poverty

One of the greatest threats to peace is poverty, rooted in a lack of fraternity. From the very beginning, the Church has tried to respond to material, spiritual and social poverty as an expression of her faith in the God who is love. Love is the service the Church carries out to attend constantly to man’s sufferings and needs – both spiritual and material. (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 19)

In the early Church, believers held all things in common. There was no longer a distinction between rich and poor (Acts 4:32-37). All shared things in common. This radical sharing speaks to an interior attitude of detachment from material possessions and of using one’s goods in the service of neighbor. The earliest community realized that being a disciple of Jesus meant demonstrating fraternity and solidarity, in obedience to the Jesus’ proclamation that the poor are *blessed* and *heirs* to the Kingdom of heaven (cf. *Mt* 5:3).

The exercise of charity is one of the essential activities of the Church, but charity “is not a kind of welfare activity which could be equally left to others, but is an expression of the Church’s nature, an indispensable expression of her being.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 25) Indeed, the Bible indicates that Christians are called to love in both word and deed: “Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18).

Earlier, I mentioned the the Good Samaritan. The story pushes Christians to a universal love, especially of the poor. There is a special love that God has for the poor, so much so that God became poor Himself in the person of Jesus. Thus, we speak of a preferential option for the poor. In his message *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis pointed out that the preferential option for the poor is principally a theological category, as God shows the poor his first mercy, and that “This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians since we are called to have ‘this mind ... which was in Jesus Christ.’” (Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 198).

The option for the poor is not mere social activism; rather, it is a loving attentiveness – “the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good.” (EG, 199) Thus, the response to poverty means not only *doing things for the poor but being with them, being close to them, and loving them*. Pope Francis writes:

“We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our occasional volunteer work, or of impromptu acts of generosity that appease our conscience. However good and useful such acts may be for making us sensitive to people’s needs and the injustices that are often their cause, they ought to lead to a true *encounter* with the poor and a *sharing* that becomes a way of life.” (Francis, Message for the First World Day for the Poor, 19 November 2017)

The Pope encourages us not only “to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom the God wishes to share with us through them.” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198)

The response to poverty is rooted in the Church’s love for God and neighbor. It is a grateful response to the call of God to be a steward of the goods of creation in the service of humanity. Wealth and riches are not evil; rather, they fulfill their function when they produce benefits for others and for society. Poverty is the yardstick that allows us to judge how best to use material goods and to build relationships that are neither selfish nor possessive (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 25-45), affirming human dignity.

It is impossible to summarize the entire Social Doctrine of the Church, especially with respect to nationalism, war, and poverty, in a brief period of time. I believe though that one could state simply that in loving one’s neighbor, Christians believe they are also loving God, who made man and woman in his image and likeness. The fundamental nature and dignity that we share unite humanity in solidarity, fraternity, and concern for one another as we search for paths to peace, understanding and mutual respect. Thank you.