

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time A Bipolar Extremism

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It is amazing how often I am pressured playfully by people to divulge which political party I subscribe to. People seem to wonder if I am a conservative or a liberal, a republican or a democrat, or if I am right winged or left winged. My response is I am not right winged or left winged. As I have shared with you before, I am a bi-polar extremist. It is after all difficult to fly with just one wing.

Like most of you, there are values on both sides of the aisle I have serious trouble with and values on both sides of the aisle I share in common. If you really want to know what I believe, read the Catechism because if there were a Catholic Party someday, I might sign up. Until then, I am content with being a bipolar extremist.

Having been a pastor for a number of years, I am intrigued how this dynamic plays out in many ways in the life of the Church. You can see this particularly in the pro-life discussion. I mention this because of the March for Life last week. Conservatives are rightfully concerned about the sanctity of life of unborn children. Liberals are rightfully concerned with the sanctity and quality of life of the poor already living. This isn't to say that conservatives in the Church don't care for the poor or that liberals in the Church do not care for the unborn. It is simply a matter of emphasis I see.

Bipolar extremists on the other hand see caring for the unborn and for the poor already living as both vitally important without distinction, confusion or separation. Caring for the unborn is obviously important if we want to remain consistent in how we value the sanctity of all human life. The alternative is a scary world where life is valued solely on the basis of subjective want or lack thereof. That philosophy diminishes us all. On the other hand, you can't be very effective in advocating for the unborn unless you are ready to materially help people who lack resources who find themselves in an unplanned pregnancy, which we do here at Blessed Teresa with the Gabriel Project. In fact, we recently helped a mother keep her baby by giving her the support she needed. We also support those who seek healing after being touched by abortion through Project Rachel. Come talk with me if you would like more information. My point is: the sanctity of human life has to be understood as a womb to tomb value that includes every stage of life in between. Does what I am saying make sense to you?

I got the idea of Bipolar Extremism from one of my professors at Seminary, Fr. Robert Barron. Bipolar extremism, you see, is a "political position" rooted in the Incarnation; that God became fully human while remaining fully divine and dwelt among us. The idea is: what do conservatives in the Church want? They want the divinity of Christ. They want more mystery and more reverence. They want a larger emphasis on personal responsibility, the reality of sin and how sin distances us from the majesty of God. This has ramifications on how they view public policy and candidates for election. Holiness is understood more in terms of piety, reverence and how we conduct ourselves morally in the mystical Body of Christ.

What do liberals in the Church want? They want the humanity of Christ. They want worship to be less mysterious, more understandable, and inclusive. Less interested in topics that divide us from God, such as sin, liberals want to focus more on acceptance and forgiveness. Holiness is understood more in terms of how much we care for the wellbeing of others, especially the poor and outcast. This has ramification on how they view public policy and candidates for election.

And what does the Catholic Church believe about Jesus? We believe Jesus is fully human and fully divine without mixture, division, confusion or change. That's from the Council of Chalcedon in 451. When people wonder if I am a post Vatican II priest or a Council of Trent priest, I say both. If I am particularly cheeky, I'll say I'm a Chalcedonian Priest. I simply recognize that it is necessary for our salvation that Jesus be both fully human and fully divine. Therefore, so also must be the Church and by extension our politics. Yes to morals and reverence that keep us united to the divinity of Christ! Yes to forgiveness and charity that keep us united to the humanity of Christ! Yes to bipolar extremism! Have you noticed how both liberals and conservatives have claimed saints like Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day for their causes? It is because their lives truly reflected both the humanity and divinity of Christ.

And, surprise, we see this incarnational principal in our readings today if we take a closer look. Let's begin with Isaiah. The highest moments for the Jews of the Old Testament were the Kingships of David and Solomon. Unfortunately, political tensions became so great in the Kingdom after Solomon that the Kingdom split into two nations. The north remained Israel and the south became Judah. Things got so bad that Judah formed an alliance with the Gentiles of Assyria to form an invasion army that wreaked havoc in Israel. It is this context that Isaiah prophesied a new King David, a new *Christos*, anointed one, in Hebrew *Messiah*, who would unite the people and cleanse them all from their sins. What they needed is for God to visit His people in the person of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, in our second reading, Paul is just giving it to the Corinthians for forming competing factions of Christians, the church of Kephas, the church of Apollos, and to Paul's horror, the church of Paul. He asks them facetiously, "was Paul crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul?" Paul's answer to the splitting factions in Corinth was Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist in chapter 11. What does being a Eucharistic people look like? Flip the page to chapter 12, one body of Christ, many parts, one body. What does one body of Christ look like? Chapter 13, a people who, at the end of the day, focus on three important characteristics of a Christian, someone with faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. Do you see how the full divinity and full humanity of Christ is central to Paul's message to the Corinthians?

And so in our Gospel reading, Jesus is fulfilling what the prophet Isaiah said about him in the first reading. Jesus is preaching in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The point is Jesus, as messiah, is the light to all nations. He brings together in his person that which was tossed apart. This is the literal meaning of the word symbol. I have shared this with you before, however let's go through it again. *Sym* means together, *balein* is to throw.

Symbalein means to throw together that which was tossed apart. Jesus is the light of the nations, an incarnate symbol that throws together that which was tossed apart.

Contrast this word with another word, diabolic. The word diabolic comes from two words, *dia* meaning apart and *balein*, meaning to throw. It is a diabolic spirit that can split nations like Judah and Israel apart. It is diabolic spirit that can toss a town like Corinth apart. It is a destructive spirit that can rip a country, church, or congregations, into different factions, like liberal and conservative. The same destructive spirit can tear families apart, marriages apart, countries apart, and souls apart. And so, what is the answer to *diabalien*? *Symbalein*, Jesus Christ, the light to all nations, who brings all things together in Himself. Jesus Christ, who is fully human and fully divine!

What does the Light of the World require of us? Jesus says, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” The word repent in English is impoverished, as I have shared with you a million times. The Greek is *Metanoia*. *Meta* means transcend, *nous* means mind. When Jesus says repent, he means everything you know is wrong, transcend your current way of seeing things, lose the myopic egotism and gain a new sight so to see the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of our baptism. This is the Kingdom that will bring together all nations peacefully at the end of time. It is from the viewpoint of the eternal Kingdom of God that we should see all our relationships and therefore our politics.

You see, my friends, the Kingdom of God transcends any particular political party or system. The Kingdom of God is both left winged and right winged. The Kingdom of God is *symbalein*, a Kingdom of bipolar extremists, a Kingdom of the baptized followers of Jesus Christ who is fully human and fully divine, disciples who therefore live in the world but are not of it. By the holiness of our lives and by our charity for others we demonstrate our discipleship of Jesus. What is one thing we can do this week to grow closer to the divinity of Christ through our prayer and morals? What is one thing we can do this week to grow closer to the humanity of Christ through our compassion and charity? When we fully celebrate the humanity and divinity of Jesus, we spread our wings and take flight, becoming a powerful force for good in this world, leading the world to heaven one soul at a time.