

Apr. 26, 2020

Thoughts from the pastor,

Since we are coming up on elections in a couple weeks here in Nebraska, I thought that I would take on an interesting topic that isn't quite as charged as it was just a week ago. The last presidential candidate pushing for socialism dropped out of the running this past week. I would like to use this topic as a way of encouraging each of you, including our young people to think deeply about how we vote.

Socialism is obviously not a new concept, but it seems to be presented as something that has never been tried. A similar statement was made years ago about Christianity by G. K. Chesterton: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found **difficult and left untried.**" Today's socialists claim that all the attempts at socialism in the past were simply not done correctly, which is why they have failed. That is wild claim, with lots of promises made with it. The promises are all about getting things paid for by someone else.

There are a lot of experts that have talked about this in the last few years. I don't claim to be the smartest person in the world, but I am going to attempt to show you a simple way of looking at this. There have been a bunch of attempts to create political versions of socialism in the last century. Many of you who are older than me have even more vivid and horrible memories of what happened in Germany when Hitler tried it, or the results of it being implemented in Russia, Cuba, and in China, etc. Most recently it has been tried in Venezuela. The number of deaths that have resulted are in the millions. The only thing that has caused more deaths at the hands of people would be abortion. Not even wars match those numbers.

But the reality of a version of socialism was actually started, tried, and has been successful for over 1800 years. It is this success that I would like to use to help you understand the problem. The successful version of socialism is monasticism. St. Benedict was one of the first to start it in the western church. It works and still does. But why does it work for monasteries and not for countries. It is simple. In monasteries the monks want to be a member. They voluntarily join the system. They even take a vow to show that they are going to do their part in making it work. They take a vow of poverty. No monk owns anything. If they own anything when they join the community, it is given to that community. No monk owns a house, car, or even the clothes on their backs. Everything belongs to the community, which then decides how the resources that the monks have created by their work will be divided out. The ones in charge of that process are voted in periodically by the monks.

In taking this vow of poverty, they have basically promised to control their egos. This is a very mature form of spirituality. The opposite is childish selfishness, which says, "What is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine." We have to teach children to get rid of that selfishness and mature toward a more unselfish attitude. That is not an easy lesson. That is one of the biggest reasons that religious communities do not allow children to join. Even adults that join are tested for several years before any permanent vow of poverty would be trusted.

Compare this with a government that tries to have a version of socialism. At first it sounds good for many people, especially for those who have worked hard to gain some privileges by that hard work and by saving money. They have not taken a vow of poverty so it has to be forced on them. That has happened in many countries that tried socialism. Karl Marx started to get his followers in Germany by pushing a hatred for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Those rich people needed to be destroyed. They don't kill people in monasteries, but they have killed people in countries with socialism. Countries also vote in their socialist leaders, at least the first one. You may have noticed that after that, dictatorships happen because voting doesn't work.

Another problem is that those who have not been trained to have a good work ethic don't just magically get one when they start getting things for free. They either have to be forced to work hard, like labor camps, or they become a burden on the society. As more and more people find that they will receive just as much for only doing a little work as those who do a lot, productivity dwindles. When it comes to hard times this is a disaster. In times of drought or other crop failure, there isn't enough food, so people have to starve, be killed, or told not to have as many children. China has been doing the last one but certainly has had the first two. Russia just went with the killing as people were starving. But there doesn't have to be a crop failure for this kind of food shortage to happen. Over time, it happens naturally when there is no work ethic, or motivation to work.

In a monastery, God is the motivation to work hard. Even a monk can have a dry spell when he is not happy with his work. But the example of the other monks, the routine of the prayer to guide them back to the idea that to be one with Christ is to be a servant. St. Paul starts many of his letters with a version of, "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus..." (Romans 1:1). Even Mary said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). The monks are constantly reminded that their reward will be great in heaven, because they won't get anything here (my Dad's line).

Our current crisis with the covid-19 virus should be a lesson in this thinking. Many people are hurting bad. Many of the ways this had been handled in past decades, through the churches, have been disbanded by a mentality that government should be taking care of all our problems. The result is going to be massive debt that we will be paying off for a long time. As Christianity has dwindled, government has expanded. Now the test of that is happening. We now think people who would take the vow of poverty are crazy. The vow of celibacy is seen as even crazier. But socialist governments start pushing similar things, when times get tough. We just have legalized abortion instead of celibacy. No government leader in their right mind would push for a vow of poverty, but they sure can set up policies that create poverty. One of them is to promise unending free stuff. What are the candidates you are going to vote for promising, and what are they promoting? Remember, Chesterton was right, Christianity is difficult. Most of us know that it wasn't meant to be. The crucifixion is our primary example of that.

God bless you all,

Fr. Frank Baumert, pastor