



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

“War is madness. With war, everything is lost!” (Pope Francis)

Peace is fragile. Harmony among individuals, families, and nations is easily shattered by unkind words, by bitter quarrels, and, of course, by violence. In Ukraine in recent weeks, we have witnessed the serious breakdown of peace, and the emergence of cruel, bloody warfare. All who love peace are broken-hearted by the anguish of our sisters and brothers in Ukraine.

As Pope Francis said so poignantly in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), “Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil” (#261). Why war? Why invade a neighboring country and wreak destruction on innocent people, property and domestic tranquility? What is to be gained in the long run by unjust aggression against our brothers and sisters?



Throughout human history, aggressors have sought the fortunes of war—wealth, power and the glory of victory—at the expense of human dignity and respect for the sovereignty of independent peoples. Experience shows that these efforts are always short-lived. Even the Pax Romana, the subjugation of peoples in diverse regions of the known world that lasted hundreds of years, eventually collapsed. Tyranny is never successful in the long run. It eats away at the moral fiber of the conquering power and gradually becomes self-defeating.

Why is it that tyrants never learn? Why does every self-deluded oppressor believe that this time things will be different?

A reflection by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI offers an important insight. The fundamental problem, he says, is alienation from—and even enmity with—God.

Enmity with God is the source of all that poisons man. Overcoming this enmity is the basic condition for peace in the world. Only the man who is reconciled with God can also be reconciled and in harmony with himself, and only the man who is reconciled with God and with himself can establish peace around him and throughout the world.

Tyrants are at war with God, first and foremost, and with themselves also. Too often they are egomaniacs who are supported in their madness by men and women who either share in their enmity with God or are indifferent to its consequences.

This is why Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is rejected by tyrants. They see him as weak and ineffective because he refuses to play their game. His kingdom is not of this world. He cares nothing for wealth, power, or control over the lives of others. He stands for freedom and compassion. He rejects all forms of violent aggression and he calls everyone to a higher standard of love and accountability.

Human egos and agendas can hinder our ability to accompany, dialogue, and encounter one another in a Christ-like way. This too often results in shaming, bullying and hatred that can lead to violence and war. This universal failing is what links our own individual consciences and behaviors to what is happening in Ukraine, and it underscores the importance of our personal involvement in praying, and working, for peace in our world.

Pope Francis has been unequivocal in his condemnation of unjust aggression in Ukraine, Syria, Ethiopia, and other regions of the world that are suffering today. He has invited all who love peace to join him in prayer, fasting and almsgiving on behalf of our sisters and brothers in these troubled areas of the world. He has especially asked that we welcome, and assist in every way possible, refugees from war-torn countries.

“Jesus taught us that the diabolical senselessness of violence is answered with God’s weapons, with prayer and fasting,” the Holy Father teaches. “May the Queen of Peace preserve the world from the madness of war.”

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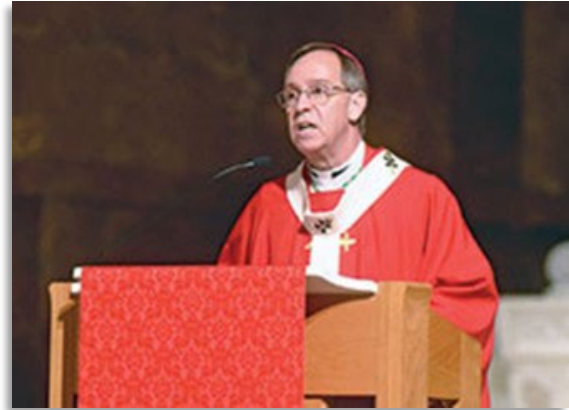
The synodal process and the Eucharist: A reflection

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Pope Francis has announced that the next Synod of Bishops in 2023 will focus on the synodal process itself. Thus, it has been aptly deemed as “The Synod on Synodality: Communion, Participation and Mission.”

Many in the Church, including the Holy Father, consider the path of synodality as essential to the Church's credibility and relevance for the 21st century. Coinciding with this announcement for the universal Church, the bishops of the United States have announced the undertaking of a three-year eucharistic revival.

While neither announcement was made with the other in mind, these two themes—namely, synodality and the Eucharist—are not mutually exclusive of one another. In fact, as I mentioned in an initial interview about Indianapolis being selected as host for the National Eucharistic Congress slated for July 2024, an intentional focus on the linking of these two primary focuses on what it means to be Catholic could provide us a tremendous opportunity of grace.



Referencing the Second Vatican Council's "Lumen Gentium" ("The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church"), the Catechism of the Catholic Church reaffirms the Eucharist as the "source and summit of the Christian life" in and through which all ministries and services are bound up and oriented toward. [#1324] "In brief," the catechism states, "the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith" (#1327). In essence, our communion, participation and mission as Catholics is rooted in our eucharistic identity.

The proper disposition for engaging in an authentic synodal process involves a willingness to remain open and intentional about accompaniment, dialogue and encounter. Such commitment for Catholics must be grounded in the word of God, the grace of sacraments and the outreach of service. Prayer, both individual and communal, as well as Catholic teaching are essential to such commitment and process.

Accompaniment involves meeting persons where they are, healing wounds and warming hearts, but not merely leaving them where they are found. The word implies being intentional about bringing others along in the journey of faith, striving for healing, growth, reconciliation and conversion for each and every person.

Authentic dialogue is predicated on a willingness to actively listen, trust, respect and respond rather than react to one another. Any tendency toward name-calling, yelling or threatening undermines true dialogue.

What does it mean to encounter one another? First and foremost, for Christians, it means that we look toward one another with a sense of awe and wonder for the sacred mingled with our humanity. It also means that we are open to an experience of one another in a spirit of integrity, compassion, courage and an understanding of objective truth.

In light of its Greek root, meaning "to give thanks," Eucharist is "an action of thanksgiving to God." As others have noted, grateful persons are often the happiest among us. In an age of

extreme polarization in practically every facet of life, feeding and being fed by the radical individualism that glorifies a sense of subjective truth while casting aside moral truth, it is easy for us to focus on all that divides us as persons, Americans and Catholics.

Yet, as Christians, our first focus and act should be one of gratitude to God for the gifts and blessings bestowed upon us, especially that of mercy. God seeks to unite while Satan seeks to divide.

Centering our lives and relationships on the Eucharist, we must strive with grateful hearts and minds to embrace unity within diversity rather than allow the evil one to drive us apart. Even in matters of disagreement, we must not succumb to hatred, deception, disrespect, abuse and violence. In fidelity to our eucharistic identity and mission as Catholics, we must always seek the path of synodality by means of accompaniment, dialogue and encounter.

In order to counter the detrimental effects of polarization in practically every facet of society and religion today, there must be a willingness and ability for nuance in ways of thinking, engaging and relating to one another. We simply cannot reduce everyone and everything to the measure of being either with or against us. There is far too much at stake to so readily “write off” one another as persons to be canonized or condemned, divinized or demonized. As the saying goes, “every saint has a past while every sinner has a future.”

We do well to keep in mind that Jesus ate and drank with sinners, meeting them as they were but not leaving them as he found them. With each encounter, if the sinner was open to receiving God’s grace, a transformation took place. Such transformation was possible because of the respect, understanding and mercy that nuanced a process of conversion. To put it another way, it takes a bit of nuance to grasp what it means to love the sinner but hate the sin. Jesus sought to save people while condemning sin, particularly that of hypocrisy.

Our fruitful engagement in the synodal process of listening and discerning, especially as enhanced by our identity as a community of believers, necessarily demands that we be Christ-centered in our willingness to encounter one another in a spirit of openness, courage, humility and generosity. Catholic presence, identity and mission are rooted in the belief and lived experience of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

As we journey together in preparation for “The Synod on Synodality: Communion, Participation and Mission” in October 2023, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to prayerful listening, genuine encounter with Christ (especially in the Eucharist), and discernment of God’s will for us.

May our Blessed Mother Mary and all the angels and saints walk with us, reminding us to respect one another in spite of our differences and disagreement. In all things, let us give thanks and praise to the Holy Trinity—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—whose love and mercy are everlasting!

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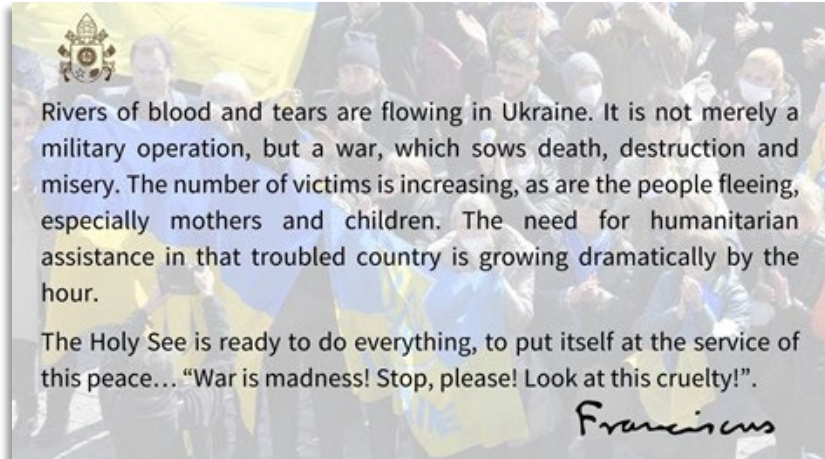
A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

260. In the words of Saint John XXIII, “it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice”.^[243] In making this point amid

great international tension, he voiced the growing desire for peace emerging in the Cold War period. He supported the conviction that the arguments for peace are stronger than any calculation of particular interests and confidence in the use of weaponry. The opportunities offered by the end of the Cold War were not, however, adequately seized due to a lack of a vision for the future and a shared consciousness of our common destiny. Instead, it proved easier to pursue partisan interests without upholding the universal common good. The dread spectre of war thus began to gain new ground.

261. Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil. Let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims. Let us look once more at all those civilians whose killing was considered “collateral damage”. Let us ask the victims themselves. Let us think of the refugees and displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic radiation or chemical attacks, the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. Let us hear the true stories of these victims of violence, look at reality through their eyes, and listen with an open heart to the stories they tell. In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be deemed naive for choosing peace.

262. Rules by themselves will not suffice if we continue to think that the solution to current problems is deterrence through fear or the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Indeed, “if we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security with their many dimensions in this multipolar world of the twenty-first century as, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty, not a few doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to such challenges. These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons, with devastating, indiscriminate and uncontrollable effects, over time and space... We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples.



International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power... In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative... Growing interdependence and globalization mean that any response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust. This trust can be built only through dialogue that is truly directed to the common good and not to the protection of veiled or particular interests".[244] With the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund[245] that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life.

Selected from Fratelli Tutti (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), promulgated by Pope Francis on October 3, 2020.

My Prayer for You

I invite all Catholics in central and southern Indiana, and all people who love peace everywhere, to join me in asking Mary, the Queen of Peace, to intercede for the people of Ukraine and all the violent regions of the world. May peace be restored, and may a lasting peace be built in our hearts and our world. Amen.

+ Charles C. Thompson

