

## **“CATHOLICS AT THE CAPITOL” RECLAIMING OUR VOICES**

**St. Thomas More** (†1535 A.D.) remains one of the most intriguing figures in Catholic hagiography, the study of her saints. In many respects, he was a study in contrasts. He was clearly a reluctant martyr, trying to preserve his life while threading the thinnest of needles between duties to Church and State. His purported last words before his execution bear witness to this belief: “I die the King’s good servant, and God’s first.” This gave voice to his conviction that his service to his country presumed his loyalty to God— there was no contradiction between the two. Recall the scene in **“A Man for All Seasons”** during which Richard Rich claimed that in a private conversation Chancellor More had denied King Henry’s role as Head of the English Church. There was no record of this and More vigorously maintained his silence on the issue. It was a strategic mental reservation to be sure, a position he held until his death. But his loyalty to God was first. In his “Letter to Margaret” dated June 3, 1535, he wrote: “I had always, from the beginning [of my service to Henry VIII, in 1518], truly conducted myself by looking first upon God and next upon the King according to the lesson that his Highness taught me at my first coming to his noble service, the most virtuous lesson that ever prince taught his servant...”

Practically all my life, since the tragic Supreme Court decision in 1973 legalizing abortion, I have felt the disconnect between the policies of my country and key principles of my faith. By definition, a pluralistic society will tolerate behaviors that some will find offensive. We do not live in a theocracy, but a republic. As a result, some individual states have very different laws than others and the “Red State”/“Blue State” division has become much clearer of late, highlighting this divide. But it lies at the heart of what it means to be a republic made up of fifty states and the District of Columbia. Our founding documents envisioned regional differences and encouraged them. They also encouraged citizen engagement above all.

Local politics has never been particularly high on my radar, but it has been growing in the last ten years. I tried to be involved in the Frogtown neighborhood during my last assignment and it was enlightening. While fundamentally seeing my first responsibility as serving God, I also see how that translates into **living my faith in the Public Square**. Getting involved in our local community (St. Paul for me) or our state government is both the right and the duty of every citizen. While voting, have you ever glanced at the names on the ballot without the slightest clue as to who they were or for what they stood? Ouch! I have—too often in fact. This past November I went online to preview the ballot weeks before the election, so that I could research the lesser-known races and be informed. Why hadn’t I done that sooner? It irks me to no end when City Council elections are held (purposely?) on off years, fully anticipating sparse voter turnout. Elections should be every two years, period! But I digress.

This rather long introduction is written for the purpose of encouraging you to be active and informed in our political process, rather than observers on the sidelines. Today, even non-football fans attend Super Bowl parties, asking the people next to them, “Now which team is New England?” No harm, no foul. But it is quite another matter to be unaware of the major initiatives going on in our local government and then act outraged when you do not like the results. I wish to draw your attention to an initiative called **“Catholics at the Capitol,”** sponsored by the Minnesota Catholic Conference. Having reviewed its materials, I heartily encourage you to join me. The Archbishop has encouraged each parish to sponsor ten people and we will surely do so, drawn primarily from our Parish Pastoral Council, Finance Council and other parish leadership, but I hope that others will join in themselves.

It is a day-long event on Thursday March 9, 2017, taking place at the River Centre and including transportation to the State Capitol. We will hear several excellent speakers and tour the new State Capitol all in hopes of becoming more engaged in the process of representative government. Being informed on key issues is paramount if our voices are to be heard. For many, myself included, the political process seems murky, complicated and inaccessible. The purpose of this day is to alleviate some of these concerns, to lift the veil. All the Catholic bishops of Minnesota will be in attendance and we will hear talks from **Bishop James Conley of Lincoln, NE** who will share his wisdom on the intersection between faith and public witness and **Gloria Purvis Scott** from Black Catholics for Life.

- I am not seeing much movement in the new **Minnesota Twins** front office during the off season. Following the final play of the Super Bowl, my thoughts turn to **Spring Training!** This year pitchers and catchers report on February 14– Valentine’s Day! A promising omen, or a sign that they will break my heart again?
- I am most grateful for your patience during the Crashed Ice Skating Championship. I am annually amazed at the hard work of the crew, including assisting us with snow removal and the outdoor Crèche take down, neither of which was included in their agreement.
- Following the executive order on the new refugee policy placed upon people from seven countries, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo and Archbishop José Gomez, President and Vice President respectively of the USCCB said: “The **refugees** fleeing from ISIS and other extremists are sacrificing all they have in the name of peace and freedom. Often, they could be spared if only they surrendered to the violent vision of their tormentors....The Church **will not waiver in her defense** of our sisters and brothers of **all faiths** who suffer at the hands of merciless persecutors...Our desire is not to enter the political arena, but rather to proclaim Christ alive in the world today.” (emphasis added)
- **Theology on Tap** continues its sessions at O’Gara’s on Snelling Ave. this Wednesday. It is time to “Grill the Archbishop,” and all young adults 18-39 are invited to attend the social at 6:30, followed by the Q and A with Archbishop Hebda, at 7:30 p.m. I hope our young adults go easy on him– we’d love a return visit sometime!
- Last weekend’s visit by some 350 college students from **University of Mary** (Bismarck, ND) who were returning from the March for Life in Washington DC, was a real shot in the arm for me. I think those who attended the 10:00 a.m. Mass would agree. God bless them and their University for its strong stand for life.
- Speaking of refugees...Msgr. Giampietro Dal Toso, who recently concluded a six-day visit to Aleppo, Syria as the Vatican’s special envoy, reported that “signs of life [are] beginning again.” He concluded, “The impression I got of the Christian community is that people are very close to each other, connected, and that they’re strong. . . . They’ve reacted and continue to react to this situation with hope.” But many, many more have fled.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector