

“LORD OF THE FLIES” REVISITED: SELECTIVELY FOLLOWING THE RULES

Several generations of literature students recall being assigned to read **William Golding’s** novel *The Lord of the Flies*. The novel, followed by two subsequent film versions (1963 and 1990), are best understood against their British background. Most people’s experience with Brits is one reflecting dignity, gentility and charm. It’s the story of a group of schoolboys whose plane was shot down during war and who were stranded on a deserted tropical island. They soon **descend into savagery**, having been left to their own worst instincts. In a common understanding, the title itself is a reference to the biblical **Beelzebub**, another name for the devil. The author was highlighting the human struggle between good and evil. But he clearly was signaling that unless society is self-critical, the drama that played out on a fictitious deserted island could eventually play out for real in wider society. And not just for boys, but for adults.

The Oxford educated author’s thought-provoking novel appears eerily prophetic in nature and is chock full of symbolism. The head of a boar impaled upon a stick becomes the false god worshipped by some of the boys, a symbol of their **declared autonomy** from all authority. Ralph is elected leader and tries his best to keep order until they can be rescued. But soon enough, his leadership is openly challenged, and the **social fabric breaks down** rather quickly. As the boys become dirtier and more disheveled, their behavior follows suit. That too serves as a symbol of how sin disfigures our innocence. Ralph’s antagonist in the novel, Jack, becomes the leader of the forces allied **against authority** and order. Even the painted masks of the “hunters” provides symbolic cover for their actions to speed headlong into savagery. Ironically, Jack who rebels against rules and authority, himself becomes the most authoritarian of all. This novel came to mind amidst all the events of the past three weeks.

These have indeed been sobering days in our community and nation. The Covid-19 pandemic was only displaced in the news by the tragic Memorial Day killing of George Floyd on a Minneapolis street. Though every American is rightly afforded a day in court, the **overwhelming consensus** has been one of utter condemnation of the officer’s actions. It was all captured on video, including his vacuous stare as onlookers futilely plead with him to change course. Sadly, following the initially peaceful protests, the situation rather quickly devolved into looting and riots. To date, nearly **1,500 buildings** across the Twin Cities have been vandalized, looted or destroyed. The cost of rebuilding will be hundreds of millions of dollars. Some businesses will leave the city, others will never rebuild. While this unrest may not have directly affected your particular neighborhood, please think again. It has **affected us all**. The challenge now is to work for **substantive reform and change** without abandoning the very institutions themselves. Because our institutions are being questioned as never before.

What has subsequently emerged appears to be an **entirely different** group of protesters with disparate and often ill-defined agendas only tangentially related to police brutality. Take for example, the surreal scene in downtown Seattle. A full six-square block area of downtown was claimed as an autonomous zone and a quasi-territorial status was established. Will it last? No, the six-block area was recently reduced to three. The entire episode is reminiscent of Occupy Wall Street in 2011. The essentially vacated Seattle Police Department East precinct was re-named The Seattle **People** Department. Many officers themselves **swiftly condemned** the officer’s actions that lead to Floyd’s death, yet feel that they are being painted with the same broad brush. But here’s the rub. This is **precisely** how many African American **youth feel**— eyed with suspicion every single time they enter into a convenience store. Truthfully, I will **never** know how that feels.

This past Monday marked **five years** since our Archbishop and auxiliary bishop resigned their offices and our Archdiocesan Church set out to **heal and repair** the trust that had been so badly damaged. It was a painful, but necessary day. This process continues in earnest through **Archbishop Hebda’s** leadership, though it is far from done. I see real progress, but also parallels here. We priests knew that **serious reform** was needed in order to gain back the trust of God’s people; at times, we have felt painted with the same broad brush as those who betrayed the trust of innocent children. But we too must be part of the solution. So, I ask rhetorically— do you feel better about this local church than you did five years ago? If so, why? If not, why not? What more needs

to happen?

Fast forward **five years into the future**— as a society, where will we be? Many astute observers believe that George Floyd's death could actually effect **bi-partisan reforms** in policing strategy and policy aimed at increased training and accountability. Both are needed. Our institutions must be preserved and purified, with rightful authority being respected. **All institutions** need reform. Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* powerfully taught that the Church embraces in her bosom sinners, exhibiting elements of holiness and the need for purification. The Church is "at the same time holy and always in need of being purified." (*Lumen Gentium* #8). If these hopes come to fruition, we may be able to look back in 2025 and see the fruit that emerged from a summer of such pain and turmoil.

- It was heartening to read about the restoration of an **historic statue** of Mary, torn down by an **angry mob** 100 years ago in Prague. An exact replica of the 17th century statue was fabricated for Old Town Square atop a 52-foot column. It was erected by the Austro-Hungarian Catholic Hapsburg Empire at the end of the Thirty Years' war. Could there yet be **hope** for our State Capitol's Christopher Columbus statue?
- The recent Supreme Court decision with respect to the application of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to cases involving sexual identity and orientation is **complicated!** Concerns over the decision are **not due** to any desire to deny basic human rights, but rather the challenges inherent in **redefining** the legal meaning of 'sex' in our nation's civil rights laws. USCCB President Archbishop Gomez: "Protecting our neighbors from unjust discrimination does not require redefining human nature."
- All registered households should receive a letter from me early this week. It is an appeal to assist us as we approach the end of the 2019-2020 fiscal year on June 30. If you are willing to help, a return envelope is provided. All I ask is that you read it and prayerfully consider a fiscal year-end gift.
- Please consider arranging Mass intentions for your deceased loved ones. You may call 651.357.1474 or e-mail your requests to Tamara Nickoloff at tnickoloff@cathedralsaintpaul.org and she will cheerfully assist you in a timely manner. It is a beautiful way to experience the Communion of Saints.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector