

On Line and On Point

MARY MOTHER OF JESUS INCLUSIVE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

marymotherofjesus.org

WHAT THE U. S. MOST NEEDS RIGHT NOW, WHAT WE LACK, IS COMMUNITY—By this time, it is clear that I have been out of the country as part of the multiple preparations for Pope Francis' Synod of Bishops on synodality. What is less clear is that once those sessions were over, I came down with COVID-19 not once, but twice. It's been a slow recovery but not a wasted one.

The time, in fact, was well spent. It gave me a lot of time to think about things like war in a global world, the judicial system of the country, inflation, student debt, the Fourth of July, congressional gridlock — all those things that are threatening to make our "one country, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" into two countries instead.

I had intended simply to return to the series of columns on religious life in the modern world that I'd started a few months ago. And then I realized that all those topics are of a piece. And scattered. How does a country become a "community"? What's the glue? And what do we need to do about that?

Sometimes the best advice comes from the ancients who worked their way

through dark times without the help of the modern system.

For instance, 17th-century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho wrote, "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise; seek what they sought."

Wisdom, at least in this country, is obviously at an all-time low. And as Basho wrote, the answer does not lie in doing what we have always done. The

answer does not lie in going back. The answer lies in doing what's right, what's wise, for now.

Here's where we are: The sense of "community" in the United States is broken in two. Broken about immigration. Broken about the Supreme Court. Broken about the Constitution and the glue that it has been for us for over 200

years. And so what?

This is "what": How can a nation, an institution, a people, a family function well without the sense of community that carries us through the dark and the dangerous times? Where is the sense, most of all, that we are doing life, politics, country together?

Then, the question becomes an eerie echo of yesterday: Can we ever get back



Mary Mother of Jesus Inclusive Catholic Community Mission Statement

We are a Christ-centered community of equals, consisting of women and men, ordained and non-ordained, empowered by the Spirit whose mission is to worship, to serve, to promote compassion, justice, peace and care for creation. Come join us.

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to where we thought we were? Or what are all the holiday firecrackers about? It's a national question, a personal question. It's also a spiritual question. *[to be continued below]*

OFFERINGS— Thank you for your continued contribution toward the growth and development of our community. Much appreciated. Please remember to make your regular donations to MMOJ by sending your check to MMOJ % St. Andrew UCC, 6908 Beneva Road, Sarasota. FL 34238.

Remember: MMOJ continues to donate 5% of all received offerings each month to Outreach, which will continue to focus on real issues of food and hunger in our surrounding communities.

OUTREACH—The current recipient of our offered financial support is the **Community Foundation of Sarasota Season of Sharing**. All collected funds are distributed to those in need in the four-county region and may be used for rental assistance, utility bills, child care, transportation, food vouchers, or other crucial expenses to help families restore a sense of security when it is needed most urgently. Please be generous in your giving.

MOVIE CORNER

The Interpreter is set in the United Nations and centers on the political intrigue and power struggle of an African Nation. Nicole Kidman plays an interpreter who overhears an assassination plot and Sean Penn, the investigator trying to figure out who is involved and prevent the killing. We found the movie interesting and well

acted. It is available on Netflix. —*Beth Ponce*. Send your suggestions of movies to watch, to ponce.beth@gmail.com

WHAT THE US MOST NEEDS...

[continued] Does community just "happen" — as in, we joined this organization so we're part of the community — or do we need to make it happen over and over again? And if so, how?

Up until now, as Americans, we have been trained to compete, to function independently, to win, to set ourselves off from everyone else, from every other nation, from all and each of those around us.

And it seemed to work. Except for the Civil War, or course. Except for segregation, true. Except for immigration, maybe. Except for all the really big questions of life.

And then what happened? Democracy. Real democracy—that great overarching attempt to find the common good rather than simply my good—began to waver. Its representatives themselves began to destroy it. Instead of working things out to everyone's good, they have turned it into a very cheap football game, one side against the other, one team on top — us, we hope — and who cares about anybody else?

We're into religious pluralism, too. Different religious groups express different values in different sacred ways and each of us have the obligation to protect what belongs to the other in each of those spaces.

But something is straining that, too. Judaism, Unitarian Universalism and Buddhism, along with multiple Christian denominations, do not teach that abortion is always, in all instances, totally immoral. And so what happens to the common good then? To federal law? Whose laws

prevail? What about freedom of religion? Or to put it in other ways, some Christian denominations don't believe in same-sex marriage either, so who can be married and who can't? And who says so? What's happening to us?

The problem is that democracy — what we have excelled in as a people — has also failed us. Instead of thinking the ideas through, for the best of all of us, we have begun to decide the good of the country by counting now, not by considering the effects of a given law on everyone. Now we simply count 60 Republicans, yes; 59 Democrats, no. And not the slightest of them reach out to the other side to make whatever it is work for all of us.

Instead, a kind of pseudo-democracy has been suborned and divides us as a people. It has closed both our ears and our hearts to one another. We're not about the "common good" anymore. We're not about community.

We get further and further away from a sense of common care — the public understanding of what community is really about. And it is showing.

We are suddenly a stratified society that ranges from the destitute to the very, very, very wealthy. From government officials who made their money on fossil fuels and now refuse to abandon them for the sake of the children of tomorrow.

From the experienced to the uneducated who have no free college courses to develop them, too. From the powerful to the powerless who have the money to "lawyer up" for white crime but incarcerate Blacks at a ratio of 5-to-1.

And through it all we continue to flaunt a minimum wage for those who, we learned during the COVID-19 lockdowns, were really doing the "necessary" work in society without getting a living wage.

What we need, what we want, what we now lack, in other words, is "community." Our sense of the needs of others. Our major hope, if it manages to survive, is that something new may be percolating underground, in younger people. These are the people we raised to be independent who are discovering that life is better and holier together.

In fact, it is precisely community that brings so many knocking on monastery doors everywhere in order to test their vocation to religious life, to consider what community will also demand of them. The very idea of community itself has been the foundation of religious orders for centuries. It is the sign of our commonness of soul, of purpose, of commitment to the model of Jesus who gathered the people around him and said, "Follow me."

Religious know that community is not undisciplined chaos. It is communal care. Community gathers us for a purpose. It gathers to enable us to do together what we cannot possibly do alone.

Community is not conformity. On the contrary, community — the different gifts that we bring and the lifestyle that grows us all together — makes us stronger than we could ever be without the others.

Community is not control. Community encourages each of us to grow to the acme of our best selves. Community is not allowing myself to be carried. It is about my carrying all the others, as well. It's on those things that community life depends and by which we must measure both the character of religious life and ourselves.

This week, in the light of political self-centeredness, we get to the marrow of it. Religious life is not somewhere to live. It is a way to live. It is a lifestyle that makes me as concerned for others as I am for myself, as immersed in the spiritual life

and its character as in the power-grabbing one around us. It is a model for an independent world that is in search of its best self and its purpose.

From where I stand, the country needs spiritual models of community, the very model that religious communities have been giving us as they rebuilt generation after generation.

When a president refuses to give up power, no one can trust power. When a political party attempts to control their own political power by refusing to work with others, they make a nation captive to a rogue authority. Then wisdom is at a minimum, community has been abandoned, the society is in danger.

What this new age needs most are people who seek with the poet Basho the wisdom of community — both in religious communities and in society at large.

Community is the glue we so badly need to hold society together — if we are ever going to revitalize this one.—*Joan Chittister*

NETWORK'S STAND— The Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* will have deep ramifications in people's lives, many of whom may not even realize it yet. Undoing nearly half a century of precedent and jurisprudence will undoubtedly have a disorienting and destabilizing impact on our laws, the provision of maternal health care and our already fraught civil discourse. At NETWORK, we speak from five decades of women-led, person-centered advocacy and hundreds of encounters with women, families, and communities across the country that have been disinvested in, and marginalized by, our systems and structures. As a Catholic organization with 50 years of political ministry in a pluralistic democracy, we

recognize the role and distinction of the moral and legal questions at issue here. This Supreme Court decision leaves NETWORK with the following questions from our perspective of pursuing justice and the common good through federal policy:

- Will state and federal legislatures now introduce and pass a groundswell of policies to offer a robust social safety net of resources for all women and families that allow everyone to thrive?
- Are religious leaders prepared to allocate resources through the largesse of their institutions and donors to ensure that any gaps in the social safety net are filled?
- Will this decision lead to an increase in maternal mortality for the people who are already the most lacking in access to resources in our society, especially women living in rural, low-income communities and women of color?
- Will state legislatures continue to pass invasive and punitive measures that create a culture of surveillance and criminalization of women, including those experiencing ectopic pregnancy or miscarriage?
- Will this decision create a chilling effect among medical providers, making them hesitant or unable to provide life-saving care to patients suffering conditions such as ectopic pregnancy or hemorrhaging after a miscarriage?

With polarization and extremist violence growing in our country, people of faith have a moral duty to work toward the common good across a spectrum of issues. Catholic teaching states that a focus on one moral priority cannot lead to “dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity.” [from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* #29].

For anyone who had made ending federal protections for abortion the singular focus of their political activity, we at NETWORK urge you to expand your focus to include the economic realities of women and

families. Now is the time to listen to the experience of women, particularly women living in rural, low-income communities and women of color.—*NETWORK founded and staffed by Catholic Sisters from across the Nation*



Unfortunately, we bid goodbye to our longtime text reviewer, **ANNA DAVIS**, who is slipping away somewhere in Connecticut. We will miss her timely comments and will be frantically searching for her replacement, which will be hard to do. **Thanks ANNA for being part of this venture called OLOP**, and if your email remain true, I will send a copy of each OLOP in the future.

THE STAFF

STAFF—Russ Banner, editor; Joan Pesce, Lee Breyer, Anna Davis, text review; Beth Ponce and Dotty Shugrue, features

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