

I wrote this homily in the week after Easter. It doesn't spring from the recent exchanges between Pope Leo and President Trump, although I suppose those do further illustrate some of my points.]

Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Winston Churchill observed, "We seem to moving, drifting, steadily, against our will, against the will of every race and every people and every class, towards some hideous catastrophe." History would soon prove him right.

Many of us today have similar, vague feelings that we're drifting towards some historic disaster. As Pope Leo has said, war seems to be making a comeback – in Ukraine, and greater Middle East and Persian Gulf – and perhaps soon in Taiwan or elsewhere. And war is itself taking on new, troubling patterns. With drones and other new technologies, one bombs and bombs, but even less is resolved than is normally the case in war – it just keeps going because for those in power to stop would be as bad as to continue.

And there is an economic toll. A crippling Global depression seems very possible. Throw in the growing power and costs of AI in society, war, the economy, and the stress only multiplies.

We're filled with such fears. We are driven by them. In America, the land of the blues and reds, everybody thinks their side is in danger of losing, but nobody ever wins. Tension and disdain for the other side builds. There can be no compromise with them because they aren't to be trusted. We can't let them win or we won't be safe. Other western nations are just as divided.

Well, that's enough depressing talk, but you get the picture. So, what's a Catholic to do in such times? First, we Catholics should not hide, stay quiet, ignore the situation in our country and world. By all means, let us take our faith and the wisdom of the Catholic tradition out into our society. Vote, speak up, march, think, act.

But such civic action is not our first priority and responsibility. And here I want to come back to our Gospel and the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus. “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped looking downcast . . . our high priests and rulers . . . handed [Jesus] over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel.” The two Disciples were hoping for a different Messiah.

A common assumption among the Jewish people was that the long-awaited Messiah would be a bigger, better King David. A warrior king who would free Israel from Gentile oppression (say, the Roman Empire) and bring justice and world-wide power to his people. That was the job description these two disciples thought Jesus would fulfill. Instead, He turned out to be unpolitical – and dead.

But Jesus was not dead! He had died -- but then rose from the dead and was now walking with them. He set their hearts on fire. He really was the Messiah – only He had come, not to save Israel from

the Romans, but to rescue all people from sin and death – the ultimate victory. Jesus is the answer to our drifting, steadily, against our will towards hideous catastrophe – but not because He is promising to solve our political, military, or economic crises.

So, what are we to do in these dark times? What hope does the Messiah bring? Despite all the troubles in the world, the biggest crisis is nothing we will see in our news feeds. Instead, it is the same war that has been fought since the beginning of humanity – the spiritual struggle against death and hell. And God is calling us to win that spiritual battle in our own lives as the first step in any other specific political or cultural role we might take part in during these times. Prioritizing this quest for holiness is not an avoidance of reality or burying our heads in the sands. It is not a dereliction of our civic duty. It's not an either/or. The most radical, fruitful deed we can accomplish, the best thing we can do for this burning world is to become a saint -- now!

As that terrible war that Churchill had felt approaching began, C. S. Lewis gave a sermon at Oxford University. Speaking to the students who now faced a radically uncertainly and dangerous future, he counseled, “Never commit your virtue or your happiness to the future. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received.”

May an uncertain future also not keep us from pleasing God today. It is always possible to become a saint. In fact, the darker the times, the easier it is to see that mere human means are inadequate to solve our mess. So, let us not get distracted by our doom scrolling and anxiety from the personal quest, here and now, for holiness and the deep relationship with Christ we were born for. Let us remember that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven. We are members of the body of Christ before we're members of any nation, party, or worldly movement – as valuable as those might be.

One step we could take towards this re-focus is to come to the Ascend Eucharistic Revival. It will be right here in Bellevue at the Meydenbauer Center, Saturday, May 16. This will be a day of prayer, Eucharistic adoration, great speakers like Chris Stefanic, Tim Grey, mass with the archbishop. Maybe most important – there will be a midday Eucharistic procession of 3,400 Catholics through downtown Bellevue. In the supernatural sight of God, that public action will have more power than any political demonstration we might participate in. There is a banner out in the narthex with a QR code that will allow you to register.

I don't know what disasters, wars, depressions are in store for us. But I do know that Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords, and if we walk with Him, we will come out of this triumphant. Let us not let the world distract us from the Messiah's Kingdom.