

LIFE AND WELL-BEING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Seeds for a new humanity

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Today's readings: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Psalm 105:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9; Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17 or Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40.

Flight (1927), a theatre piece by Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov (1891-1940), presents Khoudov, a White Army general who ironically cites the opening verse of Simeon's Canticle, found in Luke 2:22-40, today's Gospel narrative: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word..."

But he rejects the idea of divine providence and protection as the Bolsheviks easily crossed the Gulf of Sivatch. Set in the context of the Russian Civil War, the play provides a reflection where remnants of the White Army desperately resisted the Red Army.

The play was only allowed to be staged in 1957, 17 years after Bulgakov's demise, as it was considered an anti-Soviet spectacle, justifying the White Army's resistance as well as that of all those who refused to comply with the demands of the Communist regime, thus being considered as enemies of the proletariat. In the play, dissenters are represented

by Serafima Korzukhina, university professor Sergei Golubkov and the two White generals Charnota and Khudov. Bulgakov, a doctor born in Kyiv and a member of the White Army, presents the dissenting characters as pitiful, tormented humans marked by failure. The play is not about heroes but a poignant depiction of the turmoil and terror resulting from the fall of a nation's rulers.

The son of a renowned theologian and hailing from a family of doctors and priests, Bulgakov wrote innovative plays as "road drama" where characters, caught in their nation's political upheaval, flee to Crimea, Constantinople and Paris, suffering exile and pining to return home. Structured in the form of eight dreams, the play elevates the road and flight imagery to a new dimension of reality.

In today's Gospel, the same themes emerge in the characters featuring in the narrative of Jesus's presentation in the temple. Simeon awaits consolation for his oppressed people, dreaming the coming of the messiah. Anne, daughter of Phanuel, awaited redemption after her life's misfortunes.

Suffering is prophesied to Mary whose heart will be pierced by the sword and the child is recognised as the one who will bring the rise and fall of many. Joy and sorrow; dreams and failures; consolation and distress; redemption and bondage – all form part of any human story, no exceptions. Like it or not, we all have to shoulder our share in the toll of life, which constantly throws at us challenges

and difficulties over which we do not always have control. But, faced by this reality, we can always do our best to change what is in our power to change and to respond in responsible ways as there are no magical fairy tale solutions to life's complexities.

The Christ story shatters any childish magical belief system, as the invisible God 'up there' became a helpless human being, shouldering His share in life's toll.

The apostle exhorts Colossian Christians to "put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another", putting love over everything, allowing "the peace of Christ control our hearts". In this manner, a firm commitment to that which is true, admirable and good is required to counteract the dreadful absurdities of life.

Abraham's story in the first reading of today's liturgy teaches us that faith in God and basic trust in the human capacity for goodness is actually an act of righteousness which can transform deadly state of affairs into life-giving circumstances. The Letter to the Hebrews credits the faith of Abraham for the birth of a new people.

In a world on the brim of self-destruction through ecological disasters, ongoing armed conflicts, wars, displacement of peoples, genocides, as well as misfortunes and crimes of sorts, people of good will are called to keep the faith and plant seeds for a new humanity.

Why should we pay taxes?

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clearly. "Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes..." Taxation raises the revenues necessary to pay for the public needs of society, health, education, public infrastructure and it addresses particularly the basic needs of the poor.

Taxation should be structured on the basis of progressivity, where the wealthier in society pay higher taxes and those below the poverty line are exempted from paying taxation.

Pope Francis spoke on taxation being "done well" if it is a sign of legality and justice, in an address to the Italian Revenue Agency in the beginning of last year: "It must favour the redistribution of wealth, looking out for the dignity of the poorest." The pope pointed out that legality in fiscal matters served to "balance social relationships, removing strength from corruption, injustices and inequalities". He said that impartiality in tax collection is a must as "no citizens are better based on their social class, but everyone is entrusted in good faith to be faithful builders of society". Transparency is another important consideration, especially in the way the government spends



What happens in family homes is critical in creating honourable citizens. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

money, whether on healthcare, education or infrastructure.

Yet, many Catholics evade taxation. Many argue that it will not make a difference if one pays or not as they are a tiny cog in the wheel. Others point at the waste, bribery, corruption and fraud committed by politicians and government officials; bad planning, irresponsible and reckless expenditure on mega-projects when there are priorities in society that are not being addressed.

There is the need for a change in culture, where citizens are sensitised to the importance and relevance of not evading taxation. This originates from the family and moves on to schooling. What happens in family homes is critical in creating

honourable citizens and schools should reinforce the development of good citizens.

Meanwhile, democracy allows the electorate to decide on who governs them depending on how well their governments protect the State's possessions and on how they spend public money. Governments are elected by citizens and, in a working democracy, they can be cast away if they do not deliver on the expectation of legality and transparency and if they are found to be corrupt.

Taxation is only "done well" if each one of us contributes by paying tax to a State that spends public money wisely and honestly.

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QUOTES & NEWS

War: a defeat without victors

In his Christmas Day message, the pope described war as a defeat without victors:

"To say 'yes' to the Prince of Peace means saying 'no' to war, and to do so with courage, to the very mindset of war, an aimless voyage, a defeat without victors, an inexcusable folly. To say 'no' to war means saying 'no' to weaponry. The human heart is weak and impulsive; if we find instruments of death in our hands, sooner or later we will use them."

Bread not weapons

Pope Francis also spoke of the puppet-strings of war:

"Today, as at the time of Herod, the evil that opposes God's light hatches its plots in the shadows of hypocrisy and concealment. How much violence and killing takes place amid deafening silence, unbeknownst to many. People, who desire not weapons but bread, who struggle to make ends meet and desire only peace, have no idea how many public funds are being spent on arms. It is something they ought to know. It should be talked and written about, to bring to light the interests and the profits that move the puppet-strings of war."

Great suffering

In their Christmas message, the heads and patriarchs of the Churches said:

"Even when Jesus was born, there was 'the killing of children and military occupation'. At that time, Christ himself 'was born and lived amid great suffering' and 'suffered for our sake, even unto death upon a cross, in order that the light of hope would shine into the world, overcoming the darkness'. Even today, in the time of new disasters that tear entire peoples apart, hope for the whole world will indeed be born once again, beginning in Bethlehem and 'extending from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth', to restore light even to those who are now 'in darkness and 'shadow of death'."

(Compiled by Fr Joe Borg)