



Office of the Bishop David A. Konderla

July 16, 2021

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

To the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma,

The story of Zaccheus is one of my favorite gospel accounts, and not simply because of the “wee little man” song I learned as a child. The people of Jericho were convinced Zaccheus was a sinner because of his job collecting taxes for the Roman occupiers, and they knew he cheated on those collections for his own gain. When they complained, he ignored them in favor of political expediency and personal profit. Yet on the day he comes into the presence of Jesus Christ, he reconsiders his life and, by God’s grace, repents of his sins and becomes a disciple. He says to Jesus, “‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.’” Then Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.’” (Luke 19:8-10)

I believe this gospel story sheds light on the current controversy regarding the reception of communion by people who support the evil of abortion. While Zaccheus’ faith in Jesus Christ should be the response of all who find themselves in the presence of the Lord, we know that was not always the case during His earthly ministry. Many saw Him only as the son of a carpenter or believed Him to be a lunatic or liar rather than Lord, as C.S. Lewis pointed out. Sadly, this remains true today.

The failure to recognize Jesus as Lord is of particular pastoral concern to the Church, especially when we come to receive Him in the Eucharist. We believe that in Holy Communion we are not merely having a symbolic encounter with Jesus, but physically encountering Him similar to Zaccheus. We are in the presence of Christ. The Church teaches in her scriptures and in the Catechism, “Jesus said: ‘I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. . . For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink’ (Jn 6:51,55). The whole Christ is truly present - body, blood, soul, and divinity - under the appearances of bread and wine—the glorified Christ who rose from the dead after dying for our sins. This is what the Church means when she speaks of the “Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. (CCC 1345-1405)

Our faith-filled reaction to being in the Lord’s presence should be like that of Zaccheus. We should possess a profound gratitude and joy because of His grace. We should be filled with humility and repentance because of His mercy. And we should have a desire to grow as His disciple because of His love. But can any of this happen if we fail to acknowledge the Lord’s presence in the Eucharist through our ignorance or refusal to believe His teachings?

As such, I believe it makes logical sense that any person who supports abortion would also be indignant when told that they may not receive Holy Communion. The tacit approval of grave sin deadens the conscience and the ability to discern the presence of the Lord. They are a Zaccheus who refuses to climb up in the tree to see Jesus. If a person cannot recognize the obvious presence of God in a living

baby in the womb of its mother, then how would they ever discover the presence of God in the mystery of the Eucharist?

And if a person does not believe they are receiving the Lord in the Eucharist, then it would be almost impossible for them to believe their commitment to such mortal sin would place their soul in eternal peril. Yet, when St. Paul handed over our Lord's teachings on Holy Communion, he reminded them, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves." (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

Now if a person professes to be Catholic and does not believe these things, then their reaction to being told they should not receive the Sacrament would be predictable, "How dare you refuse me!" The denial of Eucharist would be considered rude or inhospitable in this relativistic and amoral culture. Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, teaches us that such a denial is actually charitable, intended for the salvation of a misguided soul who refuses to acknowledge the evil of abortion. Ultimately, the point of this teaching on the proper reception of Holy Communion is to offer all people the opportunity to repent, whether it be for support of abortion or any other grave sin, so that when they come to the altar they are truly in communion with Jesus Christ.

I believe this instruction on the significance of the Eucharist is especially important for bishops. As bishops, we should consider God's warning to the prophet Ezekiel: "Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die', and you give them no warning, and do not speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way, in order to save their life, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity; but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and they do not turn from their wickedness, or from their wicked way, they shall die for their iniquity; but you will have saved your life." (Ezek. 3:17-19)

Abortion is an intrinsic evil, which is to say there is never a circumstance that could justify it. The laws that protect it are unjust and, therefore, no law at all. *Roe* was wrongly decided and must be corrected. It offends God and the principles of our founding, just as *Dred Scott* and its defense of slavery once did. We corrected that error, and now we must correct this one. The duty of all in public office, especially Catholics, is to oppose laws that foster and protect abortion.

A political leader is a public person. So, if a political leader who professes to be Catholic supports abortion, they become publicly complicit in a grave evil. If they become conscious of this sin, they should repent and not approach to receive Christ in Holy Communion until they reconciled with Him through the Church. But if they refuse to repent, their bishop should warn them that their support for abortion conflicts with the faith and places their soul in jeopardy. If they obstinately persist in their support for abortion, then they should they be denied Holy Communion as clearly taught in Canon Law and the Catechism. (cf. Canon 915-916, CCC 2270-2275)

In the final analysis, the focus of this whole controversy is not about denying people the Eucharist, but rather helping all of us grow in communion with Christ the Lord. People in public life face great pressures and need our prayers. Just as the scriptures condemn the murder of the innocent in abortion, they also condemn hating or judging our brother or sister. Jesus taught, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." (Mt. 7:1-2)

Christians are a people of hope, and we believe repentance is possible for all. Our Lord desires we repent from our sins, because His kingdom is near, especially at His altar. (Mt. 4:17) Thankfully, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, every day people are leaving the abortion industry to find honest work that promotes life. Every day, mothers and fathers who have aborted children find healing through repentance, sacramental confession, and processing grief for the children they lost. And the same redemption is possible for those who support abortion now.

We are called to pray for our leaders who support abortion and do penance and fast for them so they might follow the way of Jesus Christ. Condemnation and judgment apart from love are not the way of Jesus Christ. Let us pray and fast and do penance for those who remain blinded to the evil of abortion, so they too can discover the beauty of life, the love of Jesus Christ and find a new way to lead society. Let us hope they might recognize that abortion is not necessary for the flourishing of a society. If we are truly concerned about this issue, let us demonstrate it in our love and care through prayer, fasting and penance for an end to abortion and the joyful conversion of all who currently support it in public life.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Most Rev. David A. Konderla". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. David A. Konderla
Bishop of the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma

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