

Christian Leadership

What Happens When “Community” Becomes Our Compass?

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I would like to start this talk by addressing some features of the cultural water we swim in; features of our society that took firm shape only about four hundred years ago. In the end, I am going to challenge them. But I hope not to do it in a put-down way; I'm going to suggest these features are good, but they are not good enough. And I will conclude it is we Christians who should be saying: There is a fuller and a better way of understanding what culture and what our cultural institutions, like health care ones, can be. We, in fact, are the bearers of a better story; a story about a better way to live.

North American Culture

In North America we live in a culture where science has significantly shaped our understanding of the world, of life, and even of human life. Science has exposed the laws of the universe, and science's

child, technology, has helped us to control human life and even society and its institutions. Anyone in medicine knows the beauty of science; and anyone in medicine knows the necessity of science. We do not do whimsical diagnoses hoping some good result will just pop up from them. We study, we examine, We test, and we apply with care. We do not release medicines for public use until they have gone through clinical trials of a very exacting nature. We know the goodness of science. We are shaped by its discipline. And now it shapes us as a culture. Science filters the cultural water we fish swim in.

A second major feature of our culture is our economic order. It can be summed up in the word capitalism. I do not use the term in only a negative way just because I work in the area of faith and justice. Historically, capitalism represented the release of the

capacity to show individual initiative in the economic area. It expressed a liberating break from rigid feudal structures. This freedom has released a huge amount of energy and imagination, and produced a huge amount of wealth. As an economic system it has brought the world more goods, more comforts and more health than we could ever measure. Capitalism, after several centuries now, is simply the way we do business. And business, to a massive degree, is the way we do life. Money, and the concerns of money, in other words, penetrate our society. Money or the absence of it, defines the character of the cultural water we swim in. Who can deny it.

A third element shaping our western culture is our long journey to democracy, the fulfilling of an unstoppable desire to have freedom and equality mark all our social relations. This was not the work of the Church, despite the thrust of that desire in genuine Christianity. The movement to human rights over the past three to four centuries sprang up and flourished quite apart from the church. The official church was afraid of individual freedom and the push for equality. Ironically, most of those who showed us the way to human rights and suffered for the cause felt they had to distance themselves from religion.

As a result, another major feature of this western culture marked by science, capitalism and democracy is secularization, the cultural conclusion that God is irrelevant because, with science, capitalism and democracy in place and running, there is no real need for God. If the human mind and human hands can open up the mysteries of the natural order why would we need to keep postulating the need for a

being that “runs” the natural order? We can do it very well ourselves. I suggest this has become true of our culture as well. We live by predominantly secularized ways of seeing, feeling, deciding and acting. This secularizing viewpoint penetrates entirely the waters we fish swim in.

I put to you a question: “Do the fish know they are in water?” How could fish know they are in water if they have always been there? And if the water gets polluted and they all start suffering from it in the same way, how could they know something is wrong with the water? So I want to ask: Do we know what is happening to us who swim in cultural waters that are filtered entirely by technology, capitalism, human rights and secularized ways of thinking, feeling and relating? Can we? Unlike fish, we can, and I would like to take a shot at it.

Culture and Faith

I am going to suggest to you some negative aspects of these elements of our culture; it is a needed step for going on to something positive. Science has in fact been so successful, we have quietly allowed it to define all knowledge that makes any *real* difference. You and I, as Catholics, may not have canonized scientific knowing, but I would say our mainstream culture has—and we are part of it and it is part of us. Today, it is knowledge as technique, knowledge as “information” that has become the major feature of *real* learning. We older Catholics were born into a different culture, a culture that believed in “formation”. The “formation of persons” was at the heart of all learning. The gathering and ordering of information was seen as only a subordinate element in the larger project of being able to discern and judge and act prudently, courageously and

wisely. This is not how we are taught to see, know and act in our mainline culture.

Respect for science has evolved culturally into a reverence of technology and technique. In a similar way, capitalism, which began as individual initiative in the economic order, has now canonized self-interest. Profit has become the key value deciding whether business is working or not working. Community, workers and the environment just don't count. In the face of this cultural shift, we older Catholics tend to start breathing like the fish who are getting sick from the water they live in. We were raised to believe in something called "the common good," not just the individual good measured only in bucks. We were raised to believe economic profits and earnings are actually for the sake of something bigger than economics. So we perhaps can recognize that much of the mainline culture is pushing knowledge that helps us to know *how* to do 'x' while leaving us starving for some consideration at the public level of *why* 'x' is worth doing. Beyond the question of how to do something, we were taught, is the more foundational question, Why? What is it for? What is all the technology for? That hugely important question has been systematically ignored in the mainline culture I'm describing. This failure to make a grounding vision more fundamental than the strategies contributes to polluting the water in which you and I swim in our public lives every day. The result of that focus on 'how' rather than 'why' questions, on technique rather than wisdom, on information for the sake of control rather than formation for the sake of good action, is one you know quite well. It is the steady, pervasive move to *the dominance of the corporate model for any and every institution* in our society. That the exclusive

criterion for running even a business, let alone service organizations, has become the famous bottom line is already worthy of protest by a Christian. But do we protest? Do we still have the "story" of life, and the conviction it gives, to do that any longer?

Social Justice Roots

Let me tell you a little story about that.. My dad, in 1949, was president of his union in the pulp mill in Temiscaming, Quebec. For the first three or four years after the war there had been some solid financial gains every year for the workers at contract time; and there was lots of work. So when 1949 came along my dad (your traditional Irish-Catholic) said: "Well, I'm going to raise another question." He went into the strategy session with his union executive before the next round of negotiations and said: "Here's my proposal. When we go to the meeting in Montreal with CIP (Canadian International Paper) to present our demands, I suggest we go beyond asking just for more money. The mill is churning out so much work a lot of men are being asked to go in every Sunday morning so, being paid at time-and-a-half, they do. A lot of us, he continued, don't have time to be with the wife and kids. Some of us are missing the First Communion of our children. All of this added work is ruining something good if we're not able to maintain our family life. Why don't we ask for a smaller increase in cash, but then ask for an increase in benefits and an increase in freedom to have time for family life without losing anything in the eyes of the company?. We'll negotiate it."

His fellow members of the executive glazed over. They were totally silent. We can now understand their lack of feeling for the idea. After the war and after suffering through

the depression, they were so happy with the increase in money because the money could get the two things both they and their wives really wanted--a car and a camp. To build your own camp, and to have it where you were the one in charge--this was so great. And the car, well, apart from needing it to get to the camp, it gets the wife to North Bay for shopping--great again. And you are able to get out of Temiscaming, just for a change! My dad never owned a car and he didn't want a camp. As he told me the story years later, he was afraid camps might break up our small-town community. And he was horrified that shopping would be so big in anyone's mind. The abyss between their values and his on this one was huge. The net result was that everyone voted against his proposal. And he said, "Well look, you have your views and you're the majority. But since I can't support that strategy any longer I will not stand for a second term as president. I will withdraw quietly at the end of the year, and you go ahead. I remain a member of the union, but not a leader." And so they accepted it, and until just this past fall, when it broke down, I was wearing the fine watch my dad was given as his goodbye gift.

Counter-Cultural

What he tried to do in that suggestion was his way, as a Christian, of saying no to the steady pressure to make work the main feature of life, and things more important than relationships. Ironically, his leaving the office of president may have been his finest act of leadership. It failed--but he didn't.

You and I are living in a culture where we recognize in our workplaces the pressure of a corporate push to make efficiency and

deficit-avoidance the true name of the game for all institutions in our society. At the same time, we are also discovering its major fault-lines and distortions. First of all, we I know it's not working. Transnational, self-regulating markets are producing a growing gap between the few rich and the increasing numbers of the poor--including children. Nobody is singing *Ontari-ari-ari-o* in the streets of Toronto these days; we're walking around people sleeping on the subway grates. Everyone who sees what's going on knows there are two kinds of banks--the chartered ones which are getting richer and richer, and the food banks which are increasingly overburdened because people just can't make a go of it on the current minimum wage, with the tight rules on unemployment insurance, and with the ridiculously inadequate welfare for people who just can't make ends meet. Both types of banks operating side by side in one society shows something fundamental is not working. The GNP--a silly and unrealistic set of numbers that measure nothing real--says the economy is growing. But when we measure the health of persons, services and social well-being, we are falling; and for many, even failing. The few are getting richer while the greater number, especially of workers and unemployed, are poorer. The management class is huge and with little accountability required of them while the voice of workers in our global competitive economy, along with their dignity, is hugely diminished.

Something in the model we inherited is really faulty, and I'd like to note briefly the roots of that model. Modern philosophy from Europe and North America has given us a view of a human being as a solitary individual, born into a dangerous world and

therefore living first of all in fear. The first expression of that fear is self-protection. As we grow up, that fear can take the form of self-assertion so we can have power and thereby be less likely to be hurt by anyone else. In this view, our truest form of relationship with one another is competition, not cooperation or anything more positive or trusting. It is our *nature*, said Thomas Hobbes and Darwin much later, to be competitive with one another. And any cooperation is just done out of necessity or natural drive; men and women cooperate to produce the next generation and away we go. As for love or sympathy or compassion, they don't compute at the level of the *real* nature of things. They are a kind of lovely, but strange extra. They are nice. We are glad that women feel that way often, But that's not the real truth. Fear, self-protection, self-assertion, competition, and a basic isolation in individuality--this is what we are.

What we are finding today is that the unrestricted market system which is based on this view of human life and action and which dominates the rules of the globalizing economy, is unable and apparently unwilling to see care for people and for the planet as deeper and more urgent values that greater and greater profits for the very few. That is a fact, a way of acting, in fact a culture, that those in corporate power positions do not want to change. On the other hand, through the positive thrust of a great variety of NGOs, the women's movement, and the ecology movement, there is a vast movement towards recognizing and accepting *the primacy of relationships at the root of our being*. We now are coming to see that the modern individualistic and competitive market system which drives all others

human interests and values in our societies does not see what many are coming to see: that the real truth is that persons live and thrive only in *community*, and one of the most vital features of that fact is the community of persons with the earth. In its substance, this is our Christian view of creation and what we are meant to be.

We Christians should embrace the courage of this huge intuition since it may be leading us back--and forward--to a fresh engagement with our faith. I think we should have the courage to say that this system of worshipping technique and the bottom line, this market system that tries to turn every public and social institution into a market-enslaved corporation is founded on a basic lie about nature (it is not just a resource for profit) and about human beings(we are not just fearful, competitive individualists). In the Judaeo-Christian tradition such a view is called idolatry. But, as we know, it is very much with us.

Doing Justice With Spirit

I teach a course called 'Doing Justice with Spirit' and I just got a wonderful essay from one of my students who works in one of the new "integrated" health care centres in Ontario. In the essay he expressed something like this:" When you talk about the stuff you're doing in the class, and we read the writings of our authors, one thing I realize is that my hospital is something the administrators and the managers believe they have to transform into a business. For example, the memos we've been getting over the last four months speak of the people who come in to be served by the hospital as "customers." And when they talk about the seminars we, the staff, have to attend they're basically talking about a need to enhance "your

customer service capacity.” In the end this treating patients as customers is simply a way of doing what the managers want: to treat the hospital as a business, keep within budget, and do that by maximizing efficiencies.” Jim has worked in this hospital for seven years and he says: “I feel the pollution of the water taking place. I feel the transition from what we all felt we joined and felt to be a vocation to personal care. They are now making the patients and staff serve the bottom line instead of making the finances serve the work of care!” He says, “every day I go to work, I feel the world is being turned on its head. The managers are happy they’re saving money—especially in the kitchen where food is now more standardized and the choices of meals for the patients far fewer. But I’ve never heard any manager raise a question of how those savings were achieved—that is, by reducing the freedom of the patients to have the food they like, or the food they can actually eat. It’s crazy!” After discovering in our class different and better views of human beings in community, he could analyse the managers’ and politicians’ decisions and conclude: “all the financial efficiency should be for the sake of people. Right now, all of the financial efficiency is diminishing them—patients as well as staff; and we are all coming to see this. The emperor of corporate modelling, the emperor of pure efficiency and number-crunching has no clothes.”

Our Values — People First

And here is where I would like to say to you: can we pray over that. Can we have the courage to say: We know that the market-driven corporate model was never adequate—especially in person-centred organizations like health care. And the

reason it wasn’t adequate is because under its sway persons, who are the sacred, fullest creation God created, tend to be subordinated to systems. We all know systems are meant to be for the sake of persons. In case we have any doubt about whether or not that’s a Christian viewpoint, listen to this: *Man was not made for the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made for man.* It’s as simple as that.

This is where the word ‘community’ can help us. I believe alive in this room, alive in your work places and because of you, there is alive in your institutions a continuing alternative culture to the cultural values of the corporate model. It is the culture engendered by our faith. It is the culture that recognizes a whole other story than the story of individualism, competition and efficiencies, the story of corporate models. And the message of the alternative culture is this: we belong to a community. And that community celebrates this different story: that God created the earth; and God created human beings in God’s own image and likeness and said of it all: It is very good. And God gave human beings stewardship, responsibility, and the privilege to care for the rest of creation, to name it, to be grateful for it, to rejoice in it and to use it well and with care. And God sent Jesus as a witness to God’s living love. And that love of God became flesh in Jesus, one of us, skin against skin. He lived God’s intimacy to us, and that intimacy, we proclaim, continues to this day and into the future.

There is something interesting about saying ‘skin against skin’ about Jesus. In the prologue to the Gospel of John the text says, “And the Word was made flesh”, and we translate the next part, “and dwelt

among us". The actual Greek says, "and he pitched his tent among us". In Greek, the word for tent is 'skene' because the tents were made out of animal skins. So the text is playing on this word in intimating: He came and pitched himself in the same vulnerable, sensitive stuff that you and I are tented in: our skin. And he was vulnerable to everything that it means to "live in skin." Living in our skin with us...

Who can relate to that more than people in health care? Living in skin was good enough for God; and in so doing God said, "Watch my solidarity with you, just watch it. Feel it and see me yearning for you to be in solidarity with me." There is no other vocation—and this applies to leadership in even the most technical, particular way—for Christians than to gradually and for a lifetime with one another, say: Let us try to do this: to see as God sees. To feel as God feels. To act as God acts. We don't have any other way to be happy or to be fruitful since that is exactly what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. Again, how powerful that must be for a Christian drawn to work in health care. But does it get fed? Is that affirmed?

A Community of Love

There are two theologians in the United States, Kenneth and Michael Himes, who did a reflection on community in the light of a Christian truth we don't normally pay attention to. They note that Christianity, unlike Judaism and Islam, acknowledges God is Trinity. It is at the very root of our faith. So what is this saying about community? Trinity, they suggest, is a way of saying God is already a *community* in love. There is a lover (this is the Church Fathers speaking), there is a beloved, and there is the love between them. And in the

Trinity the Father, Son and Spirit each loves the freedom of the other persons, and celebrates the equality of the others, not concerned for their own equality. And this mutuality among them in love is what makes God truly God, persons who are who they are only through personal relationship. *God is community*. There is no other God, there is no other truth about the universe. And humanity, in our very nature as persons, can become who we are only in community since we are made in the image and likeness of God.

Here's the key point: You and I are made in the image and likeness of the triune God and so we do not and cannot live as persons except in personal relationship. It is the face and touch of the mother that brings out the smile and the touch of the infant. You all know it in your family life. And so too in your life with patients. It is the face and touch of the nurse that brings about healing as much as the medicine. What we have in our Christian story of God as Trinity, of creation, and of Jesus tented in the same skin you and I are tented in, is a story that stands as a profound and vibrant view of life as community. And by implication, a vision of health care as a service of restoring the sick to full participation in community *by being first of all, in our care institutions, signs of community ourselves*. This stands in contrast to the mainline story in our mainline culture. We are not isolated individuals. We are born in community, we live in community, and our best happiness comes from living for community. God's greatest delight is in making a gift of God's self to us. "I delight in being among the children of men and women."

It seems our only way to bring about this

delight is by making a gift of ourselves to one another, to the patients, to all the people who come into our lives. That, it seems, is how we come to see as God sees, feel as God feels, and act as God acts. Our primary aim in all our social living—including our health care institutions—is to have the kind of living together socially where we are free to exercise the primary right of every human being: to make a free gift of ourselves to others, as God does in the Trinity and with each of us. That's what living is all about.

The Jesus of the Gospel and Leadership

This is a different story than the corporate, mainline story. And my question to you is: *have we in recent decades had the courage to live this story as the grounding vision for how we do health care?* The same question could, of course, be asked of schools and universities, and certainly of the Church. But today we are talking about Christian leadership in health care in Canada. My own sense is that the life of Jesus is filled with examples of this kind of self-gift, and he teaches us all the time how to be true healers. Let me offer a few images of the Jesus I meet in Scripture and hope you might see these as clues to the kind of leadership you are being called to at this time in our society.

I turn to the Jesus found in chapter ten of Mark. Jesus is coming into Jericho. There's a whole crowd around waiting for another flashy sign, and in the crowd is a person who's been blind all his life. It's not easy to be blind all your life. You're an outsider. So he's filled with longing. He's filled with hunger, to be normal, as you and I are. And he knows the sacred wonder-worker is present. They're all breathless: "Here he is, here he is.." And the man yells out, holding

nothing back: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" They look at him. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Now they're getting disturbed; the guy is not being appropriate. "Shut up, shut up", they say. But he won't be stopped. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus hears. He turns and says, "Who is that?" And the crowd says "Okay the Master's calling you, go go..." So he goes up and the words are tremendous. As Ignatius of Loyola says, "Get into the scene; be there." Jesus looks at him intently. He's always looking at people in this way. And then he says so simply, so directly: "What do you want me to do for you?" Amazing, eh? "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord that I may see." Does Jesus not recognize desire? It's the thing he sees fastest in people...desire. And he says, "Your faith has saved you. See, and go your way." The man sees, he recognizes the one who has healed him, he is filled with thanksgiving, and when Jesus said, "Go your way", his way is to follow Jesus.

Now isn't that an interesting form of leadership. You're the boss, you're getting a hundred and twenty-five thousand, you're about to talk to someone who's making thirty thousand and having a hard time, but you're the boss. You walk up and you say, "What do you want me to do for you?" How many of us learned that as a way of exercising leadership?

Chapter 21 in the Gospel of John: the famous/infamous, ongoing, rocky, broken-lined relationship of Peter with Jesus. Jesus is walking on the beach with Peter. This is after they've recognized him, after they've had the little cook-out breakfast--no bills, no visas needed. And he's walking on the beach with Peter, and he says, "Simon,

do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, I love you. Feed my lambs.” Second time: “Do you really love me? “Yes, you know all things, you know I love you.” The third time: “Simon, do you love me? Like, are you willing to love without counting the cost?” “Lord, you know I love you.” “Feed my sheep.” Because you can love, then you can lead. Because you’re able to give yourself over, not use the position for posturing, not using it as an expression of ambition, not using it for living in the mirror, hoping people see the new CEO is here.

Leadership as Service

Seeing that being a manager, being a CEO, being the president of a theology school is all a privileged invitation into service. Presidents of theological schools are not the most important people in the institution. If they have any true vision they know that the most important people are the students and the faculty. Keep the faculty energized with encouragement. Keep the faculty learning, and learning with the humility, and with the energy to keep going and being surprised by a constantly surprising future. And let the students know that they are received first as persons into a community and within that context and, not apart from it, they will grow because they will be exposed to all the competencies of good scholarship, of tradition, and of collaboration with respect. That’s what we need from our CEOs: to recognize the higher up I go in management, the more I am called to self-effacement in service of that which is really important. And what’s really important is the smile and good humour when the food service brings the meal in, the feeling when the nurse comes to the bedside and takes the time not only for checking the IV, but to look in the patient’s face and say, as Jesus

looks in the face and says, “How are you?” And since she’s not running away, the patient tells her how she really is. Not just, “Oh fine, I’ll get through, what’s the use of complaining anyway?” No, your look makes the patient feel: “I can tell the truth. She really is interested in how I am, not just how my wrist or how my incision are doing. She’s already checked the incision, now she’s saying ‘How are you?’” That’s beyond technology. That’s beyond efficiency. That’s what we’re about. We are not in the business of curing diseases first. We are in the business of helping the forces of God and nature to cure persons. They come to us from community, when they are with us they are in community, and we send them back to community. That’s what Jesus did with Peter. That’s Christian.

And remember, the walk on the beach is the second walk of Jesus with Peter. Where was the first? On the water... The first one was Peter saying, ‘Hey, Lord, let me come to you!’ “Well, come on”. Isn’t that incredible? Like between you and me is water, and you’re not a great swimmer... ‘Come on.’ And he does it. Why does he do it? Because he keeps his eyes on the face of Jesus. This is a leader I can believe in is what is body is saying. He says, “Come on.” And as long as Peter is looking at Jesus, he knows that he is in a place of strength.

But when he started sinking, he sank because he looked at himself, and none of us will ever find all the strength we need by just looking at ourselves. And that’s what the Scripture said. If you keep your eyes on the other, if you keep your eyes on the community you are called to serve, you will find strength you can’t believe. If you check

out whether or not you're capable of doing it- guaranteed paralysis. Guaranteed. We are born for self-transcendence. We are born for giving ourselves away and we give ourselves away not primarily in competencies, but we give ourselves away in love and embedded in that love are competencies for particular services. We never disparage our learning, our technology, or our competency. We just situate them in the context in which they belong. We are not individualists first, we are persons in community first. We do not live by competition and fear first, we live first by cooperation and communal love for one another. We do not live by self-protection, we live by self-gift. We are not just out to treat others as potential enemies, we are out to treat others as brothers and sisters. When Hobbes said that human life is poor, solitary, nasty, brutish and short, we can say that is exactly the opposite the case, Mr. Hobbes- and we got it from Jesus.

Let me offer you a final image of Jesus. I'm thinking of John 8, where the woman is brought to him charged with adultery and she's surrounded by males. This is relevant. These males have among them people of power, and they are exerting that power. And say, 'Okay master, here's the story: Moses gave us this law, this woman was caught in adultery, here's the law, what are you going to do about it?' And they hope to trap him. He bends over and he writes, then he stands up and quietly says, "Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone. And then he bends over; he doesn't keep looking at them, he gives them space to go inside themselves. They go inside, and they know their truth and they hear it. One by one by one they walk away. He stands up

and he says, "Where are those who condemned you?" "They're not here." "Does no one condemn you?" "No one, Master." And then he looks at her with that look, the one he turned on the blind man, the rich young man look, that look into Peter's eyes, that Jesus look, and he says, "Well, neither do I condemn you. Go in peace and don't sin again." And what he means in that last bit is something like this: let yourself be the child of God you are. Don't give in to all those forces that diminish your self-esteem, that diminish your self-respect, that keep you imprisoned, unable to believe you're worthy of having a life as well as anyone. I don't think it's primarily a statement about her sexual activity; that's there, but embedded in a bigger story. And she walks away in her new freedom.

Now for any Scripture scholar here, I'm about to commit a technical mortal sin. I'm going to take that story in John and jump to a Synoptic gospel. Jesus is at dinner with well-to-do men. As you know, when the Romans and the well-to-do had dinner, they didn't sit at a table, they lounged on couches, like spokes in a wheel. The food was at their head—that's the hub of the wheel. Their feet were sticking out to where the rim of the wheel would be. The woman comes in and she sees him. (I am now proposing the same woman from the Gospel of John). She is filled with gratitude, filled with no longer worrying about what these guys think of her because she's got her truth, vibrant and living at a level different than social, male-dictated conventions. She goes over to him and every feeling that is in her comes pouring out in the form of tears. And his feet are right there, accessible to her. She sobs on his feet as she touches them. And then, in

the most erotic scene Scripture has to give us outside the Song of Songs, she dries his feet with her hair. The men at dinner are looking on in disdain. Freud might say: unconsciously wishing it was them. She dries his feet with her hair and Jesus receives her touches. He receives them. And what I find there, as a clue to what true mutuality means, is astounding. In the first encounter, she was the receiver and he the giver. In this encounter, she is the giver and he is the receiver. Does it not suggest If we want to be genuinely and fully Christian, we need the receptive virtues as well as the active virtues? Receiving as well as giving? Receiving from the patient as well as giving to her. Jesus is the one free enough to celebrate and live out both. And when Peter said “yes” on the beach, Jesus loved it and received Peter’s pledge of love totally. He needed Peter to give it, and he needed to receive it—the gift he wanted and never got from the city of Jerusalem. That walk on the beach is a portrait of the vulnerability of God to our freedom and our loving.

Conclusion

I was going to say more but my time has run out. One further point may be a bit pastoral. This is a time of diminishment in health care services and I can’t advise you on how to handle it. But I do know this: Holy Week is not irrelevant. The one who loved most, the one who knew what was happening, realized that in the end he was not in control. He was in the hands of the Father and therefore he said to his friends: Do not be afraid, have faith. Have faith and you will find your way. That one is guiding you in this time of diminishment. Go forward with imagination and trust.

The other thing worthy of your consideration and your planning, and maybe your decisions and action, is how can we form parallel cultures that we not only live from but build up? Our Christian story is a parallel culture in the presence of the mainline technological, monetary, corporate story that dominates so much of our North American culture. How can we live that story in dialogue with the other, having to say no to the other’s pretensions? If health care is not restricted to hospitals but is a work of the community, in community, for community, then other elements of imagination may come in that can profit from our Christian vision.

I don’t know what to say about the spiritual challenge we face at the level of full sharing in our society. There is enough money in Ontario, for example, to take care of the health needs of the people of Ontario but much of it is in the pockets of the few, and we do not have the laws or the shared moral sense that draws us to care for the common good. We need braver tax laws and we need to teach the place of the common good and not just individual flourishing so that people can change their imaginations and their hearts about what medical care and education mean in a just society. C is prophetic. It does include huge affirmation. And it also includes moments of resistance. How you find your ways to that, I’m not particularly sure in detail. I just have to say, as I jump on my horse and ride away later in this weekend, I wish you well in it and I believe you can do an immense amount. And on behalf of all of those who aren’t in the medical care, thank you for doing such a great job of taking care of us. Thank you.