

***The Following of Jesus:
Catholic Discipleship in the Diocese of Tyler***

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Alvaro Corrada
To all Priests, Deacons, Men and Women Religious, Catholic Lay Faithful and
Our Brothers and Sisters in the Diocese of Tyler

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Christ Jesus asked Simon Peter “Do you love Me?” and said to him, “Feed My lambs... Tend My sheep... Feed My sheep.”¹ Our Lord puts the same question and issues the same charge to me, your bishop, the shepherd of the flock in East Texas. “Do you love Me?” is the question that I must answer for myself and, in turn, I must place before all of you in His name.

As Catholic disciples of Christ Jesus in the Diocesan Church of Tyler, each of us must answer for ourselves, “Do you love Me?” Indeed, this question is so powerful in its simplicity that it demands a response. We cannot merely remain silent or otherwise avoid giving a response, for “no response” is itself a heartbreaking answer to this most intimate question of faith and love. You and I must give an answer to Jesus, for the answer we give decides our relationship with Him. Our affirmative answer, His gift of grace to us, defines us as men and women of hope. Indeed, it charts the course of our very lives along the one path to holiness and happiness, the following of Jesus.

I. Secularism as an Ideology is a Threat to Our Holiness and Happiness

1. The secular world is where we disciples of Christ live. In this fallen and redeemed world, we find the soil in which to sow the seed of the Gospel to yield a good harvest.² As disciples, we do this “by presenting true teaching in a fitting manner and by the full and complete life of the Church and of her members” and so counter the effects of deadly ideologies.³ We disciples of Christ do not surrender humanity or the secular world to the ideologies of secularism, materialism, consumerism, atheism, or any other.

We are nevertheless confronted with the emergence of secularism as an ideology that becomes the fundamental and guiding principle of our society. Secularism as an ideology, largely animated by undisciplined consumerism, presents a most insidious threat to our human dignity, to our holiness and lasting happiness. Distracted and deceived, we are at risk of being seduced with the promise of happiness made by our own natural power, “...without God, before God, and not in accordance with God”.⁴ Lured away from God in the practice of everyday activities directed toward personal happiness apart from holiness, we lose sight of the one God, of our true purpose as human persons.

2. Secularism as an ideology declares the idea of God and religion to be misguided, laughable if not irrelevant, and even deceptive. Consequently, supernatural beliefs are not held as the keys to understanding the human person and the world. Rather, religious

truths are segregated from matters of daily life, governance and reason. Divine Providence guiding and caring in love for humanity and the world is considered superfluous. The human person's loving transcendent relation to God accomplished through Jesus Christ is simply denied.⁵ What the Second Vatican Council said about modern atheism can also be said about secularism as an ideology that embraces atheism at its heart. That is, as an ideology, secularism "...so insists on man's desire for autonomy as to object to any dependence on God at all." Proponents contend "... that man is an end to himself, and the sole maker, with supreme control, of his own history." This view, they maintain, "...cannot be reconciled with the assertion of a Lord who is author and end of all things, or that at least it makes such an affirmation altogether unnecessary."⁶ But we know and experience as disciples that God is love and that without Him humanity and the world are lost.

3. Unrestrained consumerism, a defining characteristic of current American culture, is an articulation of ideological secularism that professes a "present-day atheism...which looks for man's autonomy through his economic and social emancipation. It holds that religion, of its very nature, thwarts such emancipation by raising man's hopes in a future life, thus both deceiving him and discouraging him from working for a better life on earth."⁷

4. By promoting unbridled consumerism secular ideology taunts us and goads us to make our own happiness in the world through the possession and use of goods, even without ownership. Secularism as an ideology frustrates us with the promise that true happiness will be found with ever-greater production, possession and consumption of the things of this world. Though this is a promise never kept, many seem always ready to place their trust in it.

Within this secular ideology, consumerism claims to be vitality itself, the very activity of life, its meaning, value, and purpose. To produce, possess, and expend wealth, and then to produce more becomes the cycle of life. Life ends, that is to say "a life worth living" ends, when a body no longer has the capacity to produce wealth. The value of the human person is the measure of his wealth, his ability to produce wealth, or merely his accumulated possessions. This drives us to acquire more than is prudent or necessary. We tend to consume more than we have a right to consume. We are compelled to borrow against future wages in order to have and consume more until enslaved to our creditors like indentured servants. We find ourselves servicing debt with the first fruits of our labor for years to come. Our worth is diminished if we give of ourselves unless we give to receive fame or some measurable return. We complicate our lives with things we want and think we need in vain hope for happiness and security. Humanity may even find itself in danger of drowning in the very technologies that we are creating to make life easier. Even within our Catholic Church there is a trend toward self-absorption and self-centeredness that is the infection of secular ideology.

II. The Call to Holiness is the Call to Happiness

5. We all want to live happily, even before this desire is fully articulated.⁸ This is because God, in his infinite love and mercy, has placed in the human heart a desire for happiness that He alone can satisfy. God then uses this desire to draw us ever closer to Himself.⁹ God ceaselessly calls every human person to seek Him, so as to find life and happiness¹⁰ for “God is happiness itself”.¹¹ Therefore, it follows that when we yearn for happiness, we yearn for God. We yearn for the “... perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity ... the ultimate end and the fulfillment of the deepest human longing, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.”¹² To live happily is to live in the beatitudes given to us by Jesus.¹³ When happiness is distorted by secular ideology to draw us away from the beatitudes to a life of instant gratification, the deepest human longing of our hearts and minds is threatened with destruction.

6. As disciples, the more closely we approach an intimate union with the Most Holy Trinity through our imitation of Christ Jesus in this earthly life, the more our holiness progresses. As we tend “...toward evermore intimate union with Christ...” and, through Christ, toward more intimate union with the Trinity,¹⁴ the more we can call ourselves happy.¹⁵ This is because only in God will we find the truth and happiness for which we never stop searching.¹⁶ Everything is grace and by collaborating with God’s will to save us, we fulfill our destiny as human persons.

III. We Grow in Holiness and Happiness

7. Disciples experience growth in holiness as the ever-blossoming fruit of sanctifying grace first given to us by the Most Holy Trinity at baptism. Our holiness matures in our life in the Church.¹⁷ Our holiness ripens in the activities of our daily lives. Our holiness increases the more we come to know, love, and serve God by serving others and so enter the happiness of paradise.¹⁸

8. Our fulfillment, the realization of true happiness, is in living a life of fidelity to the one God, through His Word, Jesus Christ. The human person, “...through a life of fidelity to the one God, comes to experience himself as loved by God, and discovers joy in truth and in righteousness - a joy in God which becomes his essential happiness: ‘Whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you ... for it is good to be near God...’ ”¹⁹

IV. The Call to Holiness is a call to the Imitation of Christ

9. To live well as Catholic disciples is to grow continuously in personal holiness. To grow in personal holiness is to imitate Christ Jesus evermore closely in even the simplest activities of daily life. To imitate Christ is to be in every way, in everything, obedient to the will of the Father. As our hearts grow in devotion to the glory of God, we increasingly place ourselves in the service of others and thus help others to grow in their holiness.²⁰ Christ has given us the perfect example of holiness, “As I have loved you, so

you also should love one another”.²¹ Christ makes us holy through this imitation of His Divine Love by melding our hearts with His Most Sacred Heart.

10. To imitate Christ, to follow His call, cannot remain just an external action. “It is impossible to keep the Lord’s commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God.”²² Our Catholic response, to live discipleship well, must occur as an assent of the human heart, as an activity in God’s descending love, as “vital”, carried out as if our very life depends upon it, which it does.

V. The Call to Holiness is a Call to Discipleship

11. As I stated in my letter of May 1, 2004, *Be Holy as Your Heavenly Father is Holy*: “We are commanded to ‘love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your mind, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Mk. 12:30-31) We live out this command through a life of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (Mt. 6:1-8, 16-18)”.²³

Jesus commands us, “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”²⁴ Therefore, we understand that “the way of perfection passes by way of the Cross.”²⁵ Disciples of Christ Jesus grow in holiness and happiness embracing the cross. We embrace the cross because “apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven”.²⁶ Our Catholic tradition, the New Law of love, “practices the acts of religion: almsgiving, prayer and fasting, directing them to the ‘Father who sees in secret,’ in contrast with the desire to ‘be seen by men.’”²⁷ These are three forms of interior penance and asceticism “which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others.”²⁸ They are acts of faith, hope, and charity in union with Christ.

12. The asceticism of the disciple of Christ is antidotal to secularism as an ideology because it is first of all love transforming the world as an antidote to sin. The asceticism of the disciple of Christ is antidotal to secularism as an ideology because penance, mortification, and self-denial promote self-mastery and foster the way of perfection by embracing the way of the cross.²⁹ Penance, mortification and self-denial are streams of grace that flow from the Sacred Liturgy and “gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes.”³⁰ They bring about the witness of life in harmony with the Gospel so full and complete, so radically different from the emptiness of the life extolled by ideological secularism, that others see, come to believe, and enter the Church. This is the way to holiness and happiness for Catholic disciples in the Diocese of Tyler.

VI. The Way to Holiness and Happiness Passes by Way of the Cross

13. By His “...most holy Passion on the wood of the cross...”,³¹ Christ Jesus won for us freedom from sin and death, freedom to choose, and freedom to excel. “By suffering for us, He not only gave us an example so that we might follow in his footsteps, but He also opened up a way. If we follow this path, life and death are made holy and acquire a new

meaning.”³² The Cross, then, is one of the greatest joys of this life because it is there most especially that we are united to Jesus in His Love.

Secularism as an ideology can neither understand nor accept the disciples of Jesus. When we animate the paradox of the Catholic experience of death and resurrection in our daily life, that by dying to oneself one finds life, the world rejects us as it rejected Christ.³³ The world is puzzled when it witnesses disciples finding holiness and happiness even in their sufferings and trials. The world does not understand that we are actually joined in a transcendent but very real way to God through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. The world does not realize that as His disciples we are truly free and that Truth makes us free.³⁴ Though the world does not comprehend, we are nevertheless partners with Christ in the paschal mystery and so live with the hope of resurrection.³⁵

14. For Catholic disciples, “... hope in a life to come does not take away the importance of the duties of this life on earth but rather adds to it by giving new motives for fulfilling those duties.”³⁶ We are Christian, and as such, our estimate of human worth is immeasurable. The value of the person is not measured but treasured. One’s worth is never diminished in giving, for in Christian sacrifice, the cost is not counted and neither fame nor material gain is anticipated. We live in the beatitudes given to us by Jesus! Free from secular ideology, disciples are happiest living in simplicity. We are happiest in the freedom of having enough goods to meet our needs and the ability to share what we have with others in community and family, for then we are no longer possessed by the things we possess. When we are freed from the bondage of ideological secularism, then our technologies can be used to advance the common good.

15. Contrary to the ideology of secularism and in defense of the freedom and the sacred dignity of the human person, we as Catholic disciples assert, “that to acknowledge God is in no way to oppose the dignity of man, since such dignity is grounded and brought to perfection in God. Man has in fact been placed in society by God, who created him as an intelligent and free being; but over and above this he is called as a son to intimacy with God and to share in His happiness.”³⁷

16. Disciples of Christ bring “...the Gospel to the structures of the world; ‘working in holiness wherever they are, they consecrate the world itself to God.’” Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we carry on the mission of Christ, “...a great creative effort in activities and works demonstrating a life in harmony with the Gospel.”³⁸ To live a “full and complete life”, to live a “life in harmony with the Gospel”, is to live human life well, is to live life as a true disciple of Christ. Though it may seem contradictory, a full and complete life in harmony with the Gospel is a life of continuous emptying of self. Such a life progresses toward holiness and happiness because it progresses in faith, hope and love.³⁹

VII. Discipleship is the Challenge of the Lord Jesus

17. We now address the single most important question concerning our Christian faith. We have heard the question that passes the lips of Jesus and reaches the very depths of our hearts, “Do you love Me?” As true disciples of Jesus Christ, each of us is called to

answer Jesus in a very personal way, passionately and with absolute certainty, “Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.”⁴⁰ By His grace, we move decisively and deliberately to do His bidding. Always alert to the “...events of Evangelization...” through which “...God’s loving grace enters into human situations, calling forth conversion of individuals and society to Jesus Christ...”,⁴¹ we gather His sheep through the process of *Christian Initiation*. We richly feed His lambs in continuous *Renewal of the Liturgy*. With our eyes of faith on the Lord Jesus, we bring His sheep into “the fullness of Christian life”, nurture them in holiness, and tend to them in “the perfection of love”.⁴² This is our response to Christ Jesus, having heard His *Call to Holiness*: “Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy.”⁴³

18. By God’s grace, these three processes of *Christian Initiation*, *Renewal of the Liturgy*, and *The Call to Holiness* help us to do His bidding. They allow us to more clearly understand and express the following of Jesus, our Catholic discipleship, in this young and burgeoning Diocese of Tyler. By His grace, the new ministry of evangelization in the Diocese of Tyler, the Agape Guild, encourages us all to experience a deeper encounter with the Most Holy Trinity. By His grace, our hearts and our minds are opened to the needs of the poor whom Christ prefers. Through the new ministry of Catholic Charities and in collaboration with others, we reach out to the poor in love and justice. By His grace, new faith communities are born and fledgling parishes and missions of the Diocese receive our support that they must have to flourish. Catholic schools of the Diocese give wonderful public witness. Catechists are being formed in great numbers. The faith formation of individuals, families, and of whole communities is ablaze with a renewed vitality. By His grace, the material needs of His Church are met with the increasingly generous almsgiving of the faithful through the Bishop’s Appeal. By His grace, we are blessed with an abundance of seminarians, deacon candidates, and women discerning their call to religious vocations. Everything comes by God’s grace and through our cooperation with His grace. This is our life in Christ Jesus, our walk in His footsteps empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and directed to the Glory of God. This is Catholic discipleship in the Diocese of Tyler, to preach Jesus the eternal Word of the Father and to embrace the sacramental way of His Church.

19. As your bishop and successor of the Apostles, I call you all to follow the way of the discipleship of Jesus in response to His call to holiness. Christ crucified and risen from the dead is our Catholic identity in East Texas and His way, our way, is the way of the cross. Our rule of life, as His disciples, must include the revival of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in our personal lives, our families and parish life. The way of the cross is the way to live a life of happiness and holiness more fully. Therefore, let every disciple of Christ in the Diocese of Tyler come to appreciate, practice, and more fully experience the way of the cross through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In the life of the Church, let these three powerful instruments of God’s transforming love become the catalysts for greater evangelization, charity, missionary zeal, material support, education, catechesis, faith formation, and vocations in the Diocese of Tyler.

20. In a hand-written letter to the Superior General of the Jesuits, Pope Benedict XVI gives us the words to close my call to you. “The answer to the commandment of love is

made possible only by the experience that this love has already been given us by God ... Opening our hearts to God's will must renew itself at every moment: 'Love is never 'finished' and complete'. (cf. Deus Caritas Est, n. 17).⁴⁴

21. On the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, let us commit ourselves like Peter to answer "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You"⁴⁵ and like St. Paul, on the road to Damascus, let us meet Christ who calls on us saying "why do you persecute me?"⁴⁶

In Tyler, June 29, 2006
Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles

Most Reverend Alvaro Corrada del Rio, S.J.
Bishop of Tyler

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- ¹ Jn. 21:15f.
² Matt. 13:23
³ GS 21.
⁴ CCC 398.
⁵ Alvaro Corrada, SJ, Bishop of Tyler, Lent: *Entering the Pathway to Peace in a Secular World* (2006).
⁶ GS 20.
⁷ GS 20.
⁸ CCC 1718.
⁹ CCC 1718.
¹⁰ CCC 30.
¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, IaQ.26,2.2.
¹² CCC 1024.
¹³ Mt. 5:3-11
¹⁴ CCC 2014.
¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, IaIIaeQ.3,a.8.
¹⁶ CCC 27.
¹⁷ CCC 1267 - 1270.
¹⁸ CCC 1721.
¹⁹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, (25 December 2005), 9.
²⁰ LG 40.
²¹ Jn. 13:34.
²² CCC 2842.
²³ Alvaro Corrada, SJ, Bishop of Tyler, “*Be Holy As Your Heavenly Father is Holy*” (1 May 2004), p.1:2.
²⁴ Mk 8:34.
²⁵ CCC 2015.
²⁶ CCC 618.
²⁷ CCC 1969.
²⁸ CCC 1434.
²⁹ CCC, *Ascesis*, p.867.
³⁰ CCC 2015.
³¹ CCC 617.
³² GS 22.
³³ Jn. 15:18
³⁴ Jn. 8:32.
³⁵ GS 22.
³⁶ GS 21.
³⁷ GS 21.
³⁸ John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, (22 January 99) 44.
³⁹ CCC 2015.
⁴⁰ Jn. 21:15f
⁴¹ Alvaro Corrada, SJ, Bishop of Tyler, *Evangelization and Mission* (December 16, 2005).
⁴² LG 40.
⁴³ Mt. 5:48.
⁴⁴ Benedict XVI, hand written letter to Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenback, S.J., Superior General of the Jesuits, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of *Haurietis Aquas*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XII (15 May 2006).
⁴⁵ Jn 21:17.
⁴⁶ Acts 22:7.