

Rev. Derek Fairman

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, St. Paul explains that creation is groaning in labor pains even now. Creation awaits the day when it will be set free from corruption. There is a way in which the redemption of the human race brings about redemption in the whole universe. We too are awaiting the fullness of redemption at the end of time along with the rest of creation.

Yet there is a unique dignity that we possess as human beings that distinguishes us from the rest of creation. We are uniquely created in the image of God. In his encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that human beings, made in the image of God, carry a unique dignity, and that dignity engenders certain rights against those things which threaten that dignity (50). Pope Leo XIV also repeats the concerns of his predecessors, the temptation to think that human beings must justify their existence, or that human beings only have value inasmuch as they are useful to a system. "The fundamental dignity of each person, therefore, is neither acquired nor earned, nor does it need to be justified (53)."

Pope Leo also reminds us of the dangers of technology. Technology itself is not inherently evil or good (4), but it does bear the marks of those who create it, and it can be used for good or evil purposes. Specifically, decisions must be made by human beings, because human beings bear the image of God, and thus human beings are not reducible to objects (10, 101). Just as Pope Leo XIII wrote that human beings are more than just another piece in the economic system, so Pope Leo XIV warns that there are aspects of humanity that technology cannot replicate. He warns against systems or a mentality which subjugates human beings to efficiency, which also leads to a greater sense of disposability (92-96).

Artificial intelligence can never be classed with the wisdom of human beings (99). There is a specific temptation associated with artificial intelligence, which is that decision-making should be left to such artificial intelligence. Pope Leo XIV enumerates various examples, some hypothetical, in which artificial intelligence cannot replace the particular wisdom, sympathy, and other traits that are particularly human (100-114).

Pope Leo warned against the danger that somehow human beings would become so dependent upon technology, that we would almost become obedient to it. This can come about

because people may idolize technology, rather than seeing technology as an aid (137). Another way of explaining this is that technology is made for man, not man for technology.

Building upon Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIV also emphasized the dignity of work, particularly emphasizing the problems inherent whenever people's jobs are replaced by machines (148-164). There is an inherent dignity to work, and something is lost whenever a person is disconnected from the work that he or she does.

St. Paul's Letter to the Romans reminds us today that we are caretakers of this world. Adam and Eve were appointed to look after creation. When they disobeyed God, it not only affected them, it affected all creation. Even now, the decisions that we make affect not only ourselves. Where Adam and Eve failed to be effective caretakers and guardians of God's creation, we have the opportunity to build up creation, but to do so, we must not leave that care to the digital world. We have been given a unique dignity, so that we will care for all creation.

Pope Leo XIV also emphasizes the various evils which threaten human dignity, such as human trafficking (174-175). A culture which worships power is another evil, as well as the normalization of war (188-196). Technology can bring people together, or drive people apart when it exacerbates injustice. We are faced with the prospect of building up culture and civilization with different approaches: one is the way of the tower of Babel, which is built solely upon technology and pride, versus the way of Nehemiah, who built the walls of the city of Jerusalem, incorporating all the citizens in the project, and calling upon the Lord as the foundation of the city. In building civilization, there is the prospect of advancing some people by technology, while others are left behind; this is the way of Babel, while true progress advances everyone (7-10, 129-130).

St. Paul speaks about creation in his letter to the Romans, and how creation yearns for the day when it is set free from corruption. Although St. Paul did not face the same challenges that we face today, he recognized that the destruction that humanity can wield. We too must think about how we use the good things that God gives us.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for all that He has given us. We pray that we can use the good things that God has given us for good purposes. We pray that we can be good stewards of the gifts that God has given us, never forgetting the dignity that we have as human beings. There is always the temptation to misuse our power, and the good things that God has given us, but we pray that we may find and follow the better way.