

I Lift Up My Eyes...

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt

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“Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!”

In our Divine Liturgy we pray for deliverance from plague, famine, earthquake, flood, fire, sword, foreign invasion, and civil war. It seems like the Year of Our Lord 2020 is trying to hit everything on the list. We’ve found out what it’s like to live through a plague, although this plague is not as deadly as many others in human history. Nevertheless, we’ve had a taste of the irrational fear, the isolation and division, and the economic ruin that comes with a real plague. You couldn’t say we had a famine here in our rich cornucopia of a country, yet during the severe lockdowns we had to start eating what was available and plan as if we didn’t know whether food would be available. Perhaps it was just a reminder from God not to take these blessings for granted.

I pray that we don’t have a civil war, but it seems that a significant part of our population is trying to start one. The things we see done in our country by well-off, educated young people who have enough money and food cannot be explained by any human force. People marching in armies chanting, “every city, every town, burn the precinct to the ground.” And these aren’t just words. Young people are trying to burn down police stations. Mothers are marching with their toddlers, encouraging their small children to say obscene words and make violent threats against the police, while onlookers cheer and make videos. Fifth Avenue in New York City is boarded up for block after block with armed guards protecting against looters and two white, licensed attorneys tried to get black people to throw Molotov cocktails into a police car; when the black people refused to do so, the attorneys did it themselves. Like some kind of sick comedy, the rulers themselves are leading these marches. Here in New Jersey, we were ordered not to meet in groups of more than ten; wives died alone without their husbands; husbands died alone without their wives; children could not bury their parents; old people died alone as the angel of death swept through nursing homes; and the governor who gave these orders marches shoulder-to-shoulder in a vast crowd protesting the government. What government is he protesting? He’s the governor.

Also in New York City, two black women were arrested for praying (not protesting) outside of the giant Planned Parenthood abortion building. The police arrived and ordered two women who were standing six feet apart to “disperse.” The police claimed that the women were violating health restrictions. As the women pointed out, there were crowds of people “protesting” a few blocks away with the relatives of high government officials, but the police told them, “if you do not disperse, you will be arrested.” Indeed, these two brave women were arrested for praying while enormous mobs were praised by the same authorities. The rulers of our society will tolerate anything except an interruption in the child sacrifice to their false gods.

The most shocking events in these months, for me, is young people barricading a building to prevent any escape, and then lighting the building on fire. These are the things we read about barbarians doing before they became Christians. These are the things we read about the Nazis doing during World War II. There were many cases in Eastern Europe in which the Nazis herded Slavs into a barn or church and then lit it on fire. There is a famous photo on the internet called “there are no words.” As the Allied troops advanced into the Third Reich and were going to liberate a Nazi concentration camp, the guards put the prisoners in a building and lit it on fire. Any who escaped from the building were shot. In the photo, there is a naked dead man on the ground, emaciated from starvation. He is one of the men who was shot escaping from the burning building. The only other person is an allied soldier sitting on the ground holding his

head in his hands. The publishers aptly titled the photo, “there are no words.” Young people in America now imitate these Nazi barbarisms while calling themselves antifascists.

In one city where the ongoing protests and riots are supported by the local officials, they tried several nights in a row to burn down a police precinct after barricading the exits. The precinct is part of a larger building including civilian apartments. After the third night of this attempted murder, the mayor announced that he would no longer put up with these crimes. Out of curiosity, I googled the story to see how it was reported in the mainstream news media. In fact, there was a blackout on the story in the national news. The local stations all reported the mayor’s admission that these actions were attempted murder, but only one national news service reported the story, and the others censored it. I watched a news conference from Virginia in which the chief of police described how “protestors” barricaded a building with a man and his small son inside, and then lit the structure on fire. The police had to fight through the “protestors” to rescue the man and child. Meanwhile, other “protestors” prevented the fire department from arriving in a timely manner, which is why the police had to perform the rescue. The chief of police was so overcome with emotion that he had difficulty telling the story and had to stop talking. After watching the conference, I googled news stories, mainly to find out where it took place. I was dismayed, but not surprised, to see that the news media questioned the veracity of the police chief. The headline said, “fire department tells a different story”. The news media referred to the police chief’s story as his “claims” and then said that the fire department told a “different” story. However, the fire department only differed in minor details. For example, the policeman said that protestors tried to stop the fire department with vehicles, but the fire department said that protestors stopped the fire trucks by standing in front of them. That small detail was used by the news media to portray the police chief as untruthful, and ignore the real story entirely, that in our country these “protestors” believe it is a good thing to barricade a building and light it on fire with a child inside.

Some of the chief organizers of these violent movements are Marxists. According to their own words, “we are trained Marxists.” In our Church, with such recent memories of the inhuman persecution of Eastern Europe by Marxists, it seems unthinkable that Americans would be attracted by such barbarism. One of the reasons that Americans can be seduced by Marxism is the deliberate rewriting of history by its promoters. Although the atrocities of the Nazis are displayed endlessly in our movies and televisions, the much larger scale homicides of the communists are ignored by our intelligentsia, and even lied about. I know of a priest who asked his local PBS station to run a documentary about the Soviet gulags, and the management of the station said that “none of that has ever been proven”. Having taught in American Universities for decades myself, I can tell you that Marxist concepts are promoted relentlessly, though often disguised with other names.

In this short column, there is only room to mention the chief concepts of Marxism, and its chief tactics. According to their own teaching, the metaphysics of Marxism is atheistic materialism. According to their theorists, there is nothing in the universe except “matter in motion.” If there is no God, no right and wrong, no soul, and no afterlife, then who can say it is wrong to kill millions of people in gulags, or to light a building on fire with people inside of it. When I was in Russia, a young man who was Russian Orthodox said to me, “I still think communism was a good idea, trying to help people.” I didn’t want to get into a complicated argument, but told him, “I think it was based on an evil idea from the beginning. It contradicts one of the ten commandments, thou shalt not steal.” He said, “Oh, it never occurred to me it was against God’s law. Now I see why it didn’t work.”

When Ukraine decisively rejected Marxism, there were so many statues of Lenin torn down that the people jokingly called it “Leninfall.” It is funny in Ukrainian because that month is called “Leaffall” in Ukrainian, and they both begin with “L.” According to the Guardian, in 2019, there were only two statues of Lenin left in Ukraine out of 5000, both in the Chernobyl exclusion

zone. When I was in Russia in 1996, the tour guide told us that the statue in Kronstadt was one of only three left in Russia, but I don't know if that is true. I met a retired Soviet officer in 1996 whose career was teaching at the military academy. He taught the writings of Lenin. When the USSR disappeared, personnel could take home whatever mementos they liked, books, stationery, etc. He started to take home his Complete Works of Lenin from his office, but then after thinking about it, he realized there was nothing in there worth keeping. I'm unable to laugh at that (true) story; it's too sad.

Considering what a disaster communism has been in so many countries, why is it wooed by so many American professors? Aside from its metaphysics, the drive towards communism is fueled by two of the seven capital sins, and all of us who are descended from Adam have these faults inside of us. The two sins that drive communism are pride and envy. Many academics live in an artificial world where success is not based on reality. Because they are clever at making academic arguments and imagine themselves to be successful public speakers (although they couldn't survive as speakers if the students weren't required to attend their lectures), they imagine that they understand all the intricacies of economics. Many of them have lifetime job security, although no one else does, including their own support staff. (I remember a secretary at University of California opining to me once, "Why can't they be fired? Everyone else can.") In their unrealistic world, with tenured positions paid for by taxpayers, they look out at the rest of the world and believe they know how to do everything better than the people who are actually doing it. After pride, the other sin driving Marxism is that most miserable of sins, envy. I believe many academics suffer from envy because they can't understand why other people outside of academia have more money or more power or more influence. This vice is especially common among academics at the large state universities. Many of the faculty (by no means all of them) are bitter because they were not as successful or as respected as the faculty at more prestigious schools.

A priest told me once that he thought envy was the worst sin because every other sin claims some kind of good reward, even if it is a lie. But envy doesn't offer any reward but only bitterness and misery. Perhaps that is why Marxists kill and torture and destroy with such unbridled abandon when they come into power. Since the driving force is envy, the only real goal is to make everyone else miserable too.

One of the chief tactics of Marxists is to divide people into groups and to pit them against each other. That is not my opinion—they teach it in their organizing lessons. All of their "theory" is predicated on perpetual class struggles. However, they will exploit any division to destroy society. In the Soviet Union, everyone was required to carry an "internal passport" which included the ethnicity of the bearer on the dreaded "fifth line" or "fifth paragraph". Ethnic minorities were discriminated against in employment. Jews were penalized the most. Many universities and government jobs were off limits to Jews. The infamous fifth paragraph was not abolished until 1997. Already, it is easy to see why Marxism is incompatible with the Gospel. Aside from its overt contradiction of God's laws, the Gospel is oriented toward bringing people together, not dividing them. As we say in our Troparion for Pentecost, "at Babel the Most High confused tongues (in response to Nimrod's pride), but at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit brings all men to unity." As a bishop, I cannot become involved in partisan politics, but as a shepherd, I must protect my flock when I see wolves trying to seduce my sheep using pride, envy, anger, and other sins.

If you think I am unaware of the crimes of some of the police, you are mistaken. In my youth, I knew a man who was killed by the police just for being drunk. He was unarmed. He was Norwegian. In Salt Lake City, you can be killed by the police regardless of color. There was no punishment of any kind for the policeman. However, using the violence of some police to create enmity between all the police and all of us is a Marxist tactic. They will exploit any division for their ends. If we are ever ruled by Marxists, the police will be far more brutal than

anything we can imagine. Almost all the police are dedicated public servants who put their own lives at risk when they show up for work. My brother asked me to pray for a friend of his who is a sheriff's deputy. She hasn't taken a vacation in a very long time. It is her job to show up at an arrest if the offender might be on drugs. Sometimes a docile man on drugs can become suddenly violent with extreme strength. Her job is to inject him with a drug to stop the violence. The last time she took a vacation, her colleague was killed by a man crazed by drugs. Now she doesn't take vacations. And now people are teaching their children to mouth obscenities against a woman like her?

As I said at the beginning, I pray that there is no civil war in our country. The plutocrats and the activists who are trying to destroy the police and the social order are totally ignorant of what happens when the beast of lawless violence is unchained. In one of my parishes, I had a number of refugees from the civil war in Bosnia. As a woman said, she never thought it could happen there. She said she wasn't that surprised, based on World War II, that the Croats and Serbs went after each other when Yugoslavia split, but she said in Bosnia everyone was intermarried—everyone was related by family. Yet when society dissolved, the violence was unimaginable. They watched on uncensored television as people in the nearby villages killed each other. She said to me, "You and I would think to use a gun or a knife, but they were using hammers and saws." I almost have nightmares myself from the stories they told me, and everyone who lived through it has PTSD. One of those families arrived in America with no luggage, nothing but the clothes on their backs, and no marketable skills. The husband became a baggage handler at the airport and the wife was a checkout clerk at Target. The first year at Theophany I blessed their apartment. The second year, I blessed their house. I assumed they were renting the house, but I was wrong. They were buying a house! After arriving in Portland with no property and no skills, by showing up for work and saving their money, these Slavic Greek Catholics were buying their own house. It was a strange contrast with the little trailer park next door to my house where people with every advantage of American birth were living in a cesspool of welfare, drugs, immorality, and domestic violence.

Enough of the problem, what is the solution? Unfortunately, it isn't only Marxists who try to seduce people with materialism. Political leaders in all factions often promise economic rewards in exchange for support. The solution to atheistic materialism is not more materialism, but spirituality. Chesterton said that the foundation of all true spirituality is gratitude. Indeed, if envy is the foundation of Marxism, gratitude is the foundation of the solution. I cannot be envious of someone else and, at the same time, grateful for what I have. To be grateful is to say, I have good things, and God gave them to me. To be envious is to say, someone else has good things, and I should have them instead. You can't have it both ways. Gratitude is the mortal enemy of envy. Some say that envy is really the first sin, because Satan envied God, and then Satan seduced Eve with the same envy of God.

God said about the Woman, she will crush the head of the serpent. We Christians see that as referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the one who stepped on the head of the serpent. If you read the Purgatorio of Dante, he travels through the earth from Jerusalem, and emerges on the opposite side of the earth at the mountain of Purgatory. (You see, they didn't believe the earth was flat in the middle ages after all.) The mountain of Purgatory has seven levels corresponding to the seven deadly sins. On each level, Dante sees a scene from the life of the Virgin carved into the rock cliff. When Dante gets to the level of envy, he sees carved into the rock the Wedding Feast at Cana. I confess I didn't understand the point when I read this, and when I preached on the Purgatorio one year for Lent, I told the congregation that I didn't understand it. A woman told me after the service, "It's obvious Father. Mary didn't get to have the wedding she always dreamed of." I suppose she was right. Whatever dream Mary had for a wedding, it was quashed by God's unexpected plan for her. When Mary went to another woman's wedding party, she might have been tempted by the sin of envy. And when the wedding party seemed headed for disaster, she might have been tempted to let it end badly.

The Germans call that vice “schadenfreude”—joy in the shade. Instead of envying their party, she rejoiced for them. Instead of allowing their party to be wrecked by their own lack of planning, she interceded with her divine Son to save their party. Mary crushed the head of the serpent when she refused to give in to the temptation of envy, and when she refused to give in to the temptation of self-righteous pride.

Much like the wedding feast of Cana, we are often headed for disaster in our lives, whether as a consequence of sin or from lack of diligence or lack of planning. How many times has the Mother of God interceded for us before her Divine Son and saved us from disaster? The couple at the wedding feast didn’t realize at the time that Mary worked everything out with the wine steward behind the scenes. No doubt we will never know in this life how many times the Mother of God has protected us from the just consequences of our bad choices, lack of commitment, or vacillation—how many times she interceded with her Divine Son for us.

When more than half the world was under the dark shadow of Marxism in the twentieth century, we know that the Mother of God interceded for the people in eastern Europe. As one great theologian said, wherever her Son is being crucified, the Mother of God is standing there beside the cross comforting him. The Church is the Body of Christ, and wherever the Church is being crucified today, the Mother of God is with her.

If the foundations and tools of Marxism are pride, envy, division, greed, and anger, then the spiritual solution cannot be to imitate those things. The spiritual solution is to fight those very vices inside our own souls and teach our children likewise. The answer to pride is humility before God. Pontius Pilate feigned humility when he said, “What is truth?” False humility is not the opposite of pride. The opposite of sinful pride is knowing the truth about God and knowing our own infinite value because we are made in His image and likeness, male and female. The antidote to the poison of envy is gratitude and joy—gratitude for the many wonderful things God has given me, and joy whenever good things happen to other people. As Saint Paul says, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. The medicine for division is unity—seeing the good in others. Many forces in our society try to divide us. The news industry, the entertainment industry, and the political parties all profit from divisions, as well as the people who start new religions. As we read in the epistles of Saint Paul, Satan has used divisions to damage the Church from the beginning. Saint Paul tells us the solution to divisions is to keep our eye on Jesus Christ—not on any earthly leader. I said that greed is one of the tools of Marxists, and you might think it is the opposite. I said that because Marxism, according to its own teaching, is materialism. Materialism is the foundation for greed as well as Marxism, and the solution to both is not more materialism. Redistribution of wealth is based on the belief that happiness is based on material goods. The solution to all of these problems is gratitude and generosity, no matter how much we have. Finally, I said that both a foundation and a tool of Marxism is anger. When revolutions can take the spark of injustice and fan it into the flame of anger, then action begins. The opposite of anger is gentleness. In the scriptures we learn that righteous anger is a good thing, but the psalmist takes his anger to God. When we take our anger to God, there are two possible outcomes: we might realize we are wrong, or we might learn how God desires us to act. Either way, we don’t make a foolish choice in anger. Nothing good ever came from road rage. Nothing good comes from news media or social media that make us angry. Good things always come when we pray.

It’s interesting today to look back at a review of Marx’s book *Das Kapital* in the *New York Times* on May Day (May 1), 1887, one hundred and thirty-three years ago. After recognizing the extreme problems of poverty and oppression in the large cities, the reviewer says, “We do not suggest remedies. Those are the most difficult of all the problems humanity has to deal with. Such amelioration of human affairs was never further from solution than by the methods of Carl (sic) Marx. To follow them is to plunge into chaos. But there are advocates of chaos.

”Saint Paul says, “the answer to division is Jesus Christ.” What does Jesus Christ say? Jesus said, “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” If Jesus reacted with anger to our lawbreaking, where would we all be? Well, we wouldn’t be here at all. Jesus says, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden; my burden is easy, and my yoke is light.” When Saint Paul suffered for the Gospel, he tells the Corinthians who have caused him so much heartache, “I think that God has exhibited us apostles last of all, like men doomed to die. We have become a spectacle to the world, angels and men alike...To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to reconcile.” To the Christians in Rome, Saint Paul says, “Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil. ... Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”

Going forward, let us keep close to the Mother of God. There is no evil more powerful than her gentle protection. Remember her words when her wedding plans were overturned by the Archangel, “Be it done unto me according to your word—according to God’s word.” Remember her words when she rescued the wedding feast at Cana, “Do whatever He tells you — whatever Jesus tells you.” She was with our people under communist rule in the Soviet Union. She was with our nuns, our monks, our priests and bishops in the Siberian gulags. As we sing in our tropar, “Today, the Virgin is present in the Church.”

Also remember, there is only one Master of History. He isn’t our ideologies or political factions. As Saint Velimirovich said, “He is very far from him who forgives his own sins. He is close, oh so very close, to him who cries out to heaven in repentance.” Saint John had a vision of the Master of History: “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it is called faithful and true, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name inscribed which no one knows but Himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is the Word of God...From His mouth issues a sharp sword with which to strike the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh, He has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.” He is the Master of History. Saint John ends his book of Revelations thus, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” Maranatha.

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