

Archbishop Smith: The Rule of Law

We've been hearing that phrase a great deal lately here in Canada. Since early this month, protesters have been staging blockades at critical points of our national railway system. These actions have been crippling our economy. The serious situation has elicited a variety of commentary, among which is the frequently repeated call for the rule of law to be respected. Regardless of one's opinion on this particular issue, everyone can see plainly what happens when the rule of law is ignored. Chaos ensues. Actually, we don't need this particular series of protests to teach us that. One can simply imagine what the state of a city would be were its traffic laws to be ignored. The straight line from lawlessness to bedlam is easy to trace.

It is ironic, then, that we seem unable (or unwilling?) to "connect the dots" when it comes to the link between societal or personal disarray and disregard of the law of God.

The passages from Sacred Scripture proclaimed at mass on Sunday direct our attention to the divine law. From the Book of Sirach we have this: "If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and they will save you." God's law is a gift of His love, given to protect and guide us. It is granted to teach us how to live a rightly ordered life that leads to peace. The Psalmist puts it beautifully: "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper." (Psalm 1: 1-3) Accepting the rule of God's law leads to peace and fullness of life. It follows that turning away from this law will have the opposite effect.

When we listen to the teaching of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5: 17-37), we realize that the choice to follow the law of God is not a matter of mere compliance. It runs much deeper. After stating clearly that he has come among us not to abolish but to fulfill the divine law, Jesus goes on to insist that obeying the law of God is much more than simple external observance. True disciples of Christ will acknowledge their reliance upon the wisdom and providence of God by obeying his laws from a deep inner disposition of trust and love, and an interior readiness to allow God's law to transform their hearts completely. So, for example, Jesus says that while one must obviously not murder, true obedience means keeping the heart free from anger that can lead to not only murder but also name-calling and insults. Or, while it is clear that one must avoid the act of adultery, Jesus makes it also clear that true obedience to the law of God means not even lusting toward another in one's thoughts.

Absent the rule of divine law, obeyed and followed in accord with the teaching of Jesus, personal, familial and societal life will be marked by chaos,

confusion and conflict. This is not what we want. If we accept the necessity of the rule of law in our ordinary everyday living, all the more do we need to embrace fully the reign of God's law – His law of love – if we are to know and experience true peace.