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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 22, 2023

My Dear Sons and Daughters in Christ:

May the love and grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be upon you always!

In this time of great turmoil in the Church and in the world, I must speak to you from a father's heart in order to warn you of the evils that threaten us, and to assure you of the joy and hope that we have always in our Lord Jesus Christ. The evil and false message that has invaded the Church, Christ's Bride, is that Jesus is only one among many, and that it is not necessary for His message to be shared with all humanity. This idea must be shunned and refuted at every turn. We must share the joyful good news that Jesus is our only Lord, and that He desires that all humanity for all time may embrace eternal life in Him.

Once we understand that Jesus Christ, God's Divine Son, is the fullness of revelation and the fulfillment of the Father's plan of salvation for all humanity for all time, and we embrace this with all our hearts, then we can address the other errors that plague our Church and our world which have been brought about by a departure from Truth.

In St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, he writes: "I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by {the} grace {of Christ} for a different gospel {not that there is another}. But there are some who are disturbing you and wish to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach {to you} a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one that you received, let that one be accursed!" (Gal 1:6-9)

As your spiritual father, I feel it is important to reiterate the following basic truths that have always been understood by the Church from time immemorial, and to emphasize that the Church exists not to redefine matters of faith, but to safeguard the Deposit of Faith as it has been handed down to us from Our Lord Himself through the apostles and the saints and martyrs. Again, hearkening back to St. Paul's warning to the Galatians, any attempts to pervert the true Gospel message must be categorically rejected as injurious to the Bride of Christ and her individual members.

1. Christ established One Church—the Catholic Church—and, therefore, only the Catholic Church provides the fullness of Christ's truth and the authentic path to His salvation for all of us.
2. The Eucharist and all the sacraments are divinely instituted, not developed by man. The Eucharist is truly Christ's Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, and to receive Him in Communion unworthily (i.e. in a state of grave, unrepentant sin) is a devastating sacrilege for the individual and for the Church. (1 Cor 11:27-29)

3. The Sacrament of Matrimony is instituted by God. Through Natural Law, God has established marriage as between one man and one woman faithful to each other for life and open to children. Humanity has no right or true ability to redefine marriage.
4. Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God, male or female, and all people should be helped to discover their true identities as children of God, and not supported in a disordered attempt to reject their undeniable biological and God-given identity.
5. Sexual activity outside marriage is always gravely sinful and cannot be condoned, blessed, or deemed permissible by any authority inside the Church.
6. The belief that all men and women will be saved regardless of how they live their lives (a concept commonly referred to as universalism) is false and is dangerous, as it contradicts what Jesus tells us repeatedly in the Gospel. Jesus says we must “deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him.” (Matt 16:24) He has given us the way, through His grace, to victory over sin and death through repentance and sacramental confession. It is essential that we embrace the joy and hope, as well as the freedom, that come from repentance and humbly confessing our sins. Through repentance and sacramental confession, every battle with temptation and sin can be a small victory that leads us to embrace the great victory that Christ has won for us.
7. In order to follow Jesus Christ, we must willingly choose to take up our cross instead of attempting to avoid the cross and suffering that Our Lord offers to each of us individually in our daily lives. The mystery of redemptive suffering—i.e. suffering that Our Lord allows us to experience and accept in this world and then offer back to Him in union with His suffering—humbles us, purifies us, and draws us deeper into the joy of a life lived in Christ. That is not to say that we must enjoy or seek out suffering, but if we are united to Christ, as we experience our daily sufferings we can find the hope and joy that exist amidst the suffering and persevere to the end in all our suffering. (cf. 2 Tim 4:6-8)

In the weeks and months ahead, many of these truths will be examined as part of the Synod on Synodality. We must hold fast to these truths and be wary of any attempts to present an alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or to push for a faith that speaks of dialogue and brotherhood, while attempting to remove the fatherhood of God. When we seek to innovate upon what God in His great mercy has given us, we find ourselves upon treacherous ground. The surest footing we can find is to remain firmly upon the perennial teachings of the faith.

Regrettably, it may be that some will label as schismatics those who disagree with the changes being proposed. Be assured, however, that no one who remains firmly upon the plumb line of our Catholic faith is a schismatic. We must remain unabashedly and truly Catholic, regardless of what may be brought forth. We must be aware also that it is not leaving the Church to stand firm against these proposed changes. As St. Peter said, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (Jn 6:68) Therefore, standing firm does not mean we are seeking to leave the Church. Instead, those who would

propose changes to that which cannot be changed seek to commandeer Christ's Church, and they are indeed the true schismatics.

I urge you, my sons and daughters in Christ, that now is the time to make sure you stand firmly upon the Catholic faith of the ages. We were all created to seek the Way, the Truth and the Life, and in this modern age of confusion, the true path is the one that is illuminated by the light of Jesus Christ, for Truth has a face and indeed it is His face. Be assured that He will not abandon His Bride.

I remain your humble father and servant,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joseph E. Strickland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent cross-like symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler