

- Bishop Burbidge: This is Bishop Michael Burbidge, and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.
- Billy Atwell: Podcasting from the St. Clair Studio here in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to the Walk Humbly podcast. I'm Billy Atwell, Chief Communications Officer for the diocese and your co-host. We want to thank all those who have given to the Bishops Lenten Appeal throughout this year. The BLA supports many ministries here in the diocese, but one of those is the communications office. So we want to thank those who made this studio and this podcast possible. If you haven't already, please make sure you write a review for this podcast or offer a rating. It's iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, wherever you're listening. And if you're on YouTube, please make sure you subscribe and ring the bell. Sign up for our e-newsletter at [arlingtondiocese.org](http://arlingtondiocese.org). You can follow Bishop Burbidge on Twitter @BishopBurbidge, where every day you can read a short gospel reflection for that day. We're on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Follow us there. Send your questions to Bishop Burbidge. Email us at [info@arlingtondiocese.org](mailto:info@arlingtondiocese.org). Again, that's [info@arlingtondiocese.org](mailto:info@arlingtondiocese.org), or you can shoot us a message on social media.
- Bishop Burbidge is celebrating the Christmas vigil mass on December 24th. It's at 10 p.m., here at the Cathedral of St. Thomas Moore. We'd love to see you there. I welcome your host, Bishop Burbidge. Bishop, how you doing?
- Bishop Burbidge: Billy, I'm doing well. I hope all of our listeners are doing well and continue to enjoy the blessings of these sacred days as we enter in the final preparation of time for the celebration of Christmas and pray that those blessings will remain theirs.
- Billy Atwell: It's been a beautiful advent. How has your advent been?
- Bishop Burbidge: Yeah, it's been a wonderful advent. Spiritually, it's gone well for me this year, having time to commit to the spiritual life, as all of us are called to do. Pastorally, it's been wonderful being out in the parishes and being with the faithful. Even last week was such a great week. I had an advent day of prayer with all my brother priests, and that brings me such joy to be with all of our great priests, to see how they have such a special fraternity, how they take care of one another, and how committed they are to their spiritual lives. It was very, very a blessed day and gather with all the team here at our chancery side also for an advent day of prayer. So it's been well and hope it's the same for our listeners.
- Billy Atwell: Absolutely. As we get ready for Christmas day, obviously we look forward to Christmas day for good reason, but so many in our culture think of Christmas as a day. As Catholics, we understand it to be a season. It begins on Christmas Day. A lot of people see Christmas season as what we call advent. So there's all kinds of confusion going on. So as we begin the Christmas season, how do you recommend that we work our way through it intentionally, especially within the

family context where we're trying to teach these things to our kids and encourage them? Any recommendations for helping do that?

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah. No, it's always great to teach the children and ourselves [00:03:00] to review the liturgical calendar. I mean that gives us a beautiful rhythm to our spiritual lives, and advent has been such a gift. Then we enter into the solemnity of Christmas. But as you say, it's a Christmas season. It goes to the baptism of the Lord. So I think that's a powerful reminder of what we do at Christmas, before Christmas, on Christmas day. They're the things that must continue throughout the Christmas season and beyond, the things of [00:03:30] stopping and pausing, taking hold of our spiritual lives. What is Christmas all about? It's the birth of our savior. Well, what's my relationship with Jesus and how can I strengthen that?

To see the care and the generosity at this time of year is absolutely incredible. To see the goodness of people being so mindful of others, especially those in need, providing food and clothing and toys. Well that spirit has to continue. It doesn't end at Christmas. It just gives us the inspiration to make that a part of our daily lives. Seeing so many people ... I was at All Saints last night. There were 30 priests hearing confessions, and we were there each for about two and a half, three hours. So seeing people wanting to be reconciled with God, the God who when we stumble, when we fall, is there to pick us up and bring us new life, that that right relationship with God continues. So the idea of a Christmas season is a great reminder, what we do now must continue.

Billy Atwell: Absolutely. That's wonderful. There's a couple of news items I want to ask you about. Some surprising news came out this past weekend, an announcement from the Vatican, stated that Frank Pavone, known for his work with Priests for Life, has been dismissed from the clerical state. It was noted that there was no possibility of appeal in this case. The reasons for his laicization were described as blasphemous communications on social media and persistent disobedience of the lawful instructions of his diocesan bishop. There's obviously a lot of things that we can't know, so I'm not asking you to get into specifics, but what was your reaction to that announcement?

Bishop Burbidge: I begin with that same statement, Billy, that I have no firsthand knowledge about Pavone's canonical case nor the issues behind the scene. So I have no firsthand knowledge. I found it surprising and saddening. It's very big news. No matter how someone feels about a particular priest, anytime a priest requests a laicization or is dismissed against their will from the clerical state, it's a tragedy. It's a tragedy and it has to unite us in prayer. There's many theories out there, but it's important for our listeners to know that the canonical process to dismiss a priest from the clerical state is extremely serious and it's a thorough process. It never happens quickly. As a Bishop, sadly I've been part of such processes and there is that ample opportunity for ... It's a process. It was a due process. People to respond and clarify the truth, defend themselves, et cetera. But it has to have a strict confidentiality for everyone involved.

And this was supported by what the Dicastery for the Clergy said in their statement, namely that Pavone was given ample opportunity to defend himself, as well as to submit to the authority of his diocesan bishop. But it is a little unusual to say publicly that there is no appeal to this. It's over. So that gives us the assurance that the Holy See has done everything according to the process of church law. But on a pastoral note, as I speak to our listeners, I ask everyone to please pray for all involved in this situation, but also pray most especially, and this is the key, that this dismissal is not used to divide us, to divide those in the pro-life movement. No movement of God is rooted in any human being except for Jesus, the Son of God, the author of life itself. So we have to remain unified, focused on protecting the unborn, supporting mothers in need and trust the confidential process to the appropriate authorities.

Billy Atwell:

Yeah, absolutely. I appreciate that perspective. Thank you. Earlier this month, President Biden signed into law the really deceptively named Respect for Marriage Act. This law codifies so-called same-sex marriage into our legal framework, and it opens the possibility of litigation against organizations that disagree. The Chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishop's Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, Bishop Barron, stated, "Decades of social and legal developments have torn sexuality, childbearing, and marriage from each other in the public consciousness. Much of society has lost sight of the purpose of marriage and now equates it with adult companionship. This bill fails to include clear, comprehensive and affirming conscience protections for religious organizations and individuals who uphold the sanctity of traditional marriage that are needed."

You issued a statement as well and said in part, "While the act was named the Respect for Marriage Act, it in fact shows grave disrespect for the institution of marriage as written in natural law. Marriage between a man and a woman is an institution understood throughout history as the foundational building block of society." So we're a couple weeks out from this bill. The full ramifications legally especially are not really felt yet, but that will come. What are your thoughts as we come off the heels of this?

Bishop Burbidge:

Well, you're right. As we said, it's not appropriately named. It's not respect for marriage as Jesus instituted it, as Jesus intended, as Jesus has taught. So let me just begin, first of all by just thanking all of our faithful married couples out there. When we see marriage as Jesus intended being attacked, that must be hard for married couples who are doing what is right and living their beautiful vocation. So I want to begin by just thanking all of our married couples out there for your faithful witness. You receive the sacrament of marriage because it's a sign. It's a sign of the way that Christ loves His church, His bride. So it is the union of one man and one woman forever, faithfully, open to the gift of life. And when we look at married couples, we are able to say, God willing, "You see how they love one another? That's the way Christ loves us." So all the married couples, thank you for your vocation and we will continue everything possible to uphold, to celebrate marriage as Jesus intended.

But we know Billy, and you're making a good point here, it's concerning. It's frustrating to see something that we know to be untrue enshrined in law. Marriage in the United States is suffering as it is. We know that. Many young people see no reason to get married. Divorce continues to be a tragic reality of our culture. Many children are growing up with one parent. And this provides an opportunity for us to really regroup, but we should not shrine into the law something that we know to be contrary to God's will and to natural law.

Bishop Barron made a good point. There's also the concern about religious freedom here. This is a serious threat against religious freedom. Some very narrow protections are written into the law, but many experts are saying this is far from enough. It's not enough. They also say that religious liberty and free speech cases may be harder to win, and that nonprofits and social service organizations could be deeply jeopardized if they hold to a traditional definition of marriage in their operations and hiring practices. So that is a true threat. So we have to be very, very careful that it does not impede us from doing the work of God and the many charitable ministries for which we are known. So what can we do? We're certainly going to be vigilant. We're going to pray, we're going to speak out, we're going to defend our beliefs without compromise, because we can't be silent about the truth God has given us.

Billy Atwell: You made a similar point after the elections, whether your person won or not, our job is the same.

Bishop Burbidge: Right, exactly.

Billy Atwell: So even when there's a failure like this, well if we had won and marriage was tried in a more appropriate way, would we say, "Well, we don't need to speak out or pray anymore"? [00:11:30] No, there's still plenty of work to do. So that's a good mantra.

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah, work continues. Good point. Good point.

Billy Atwell: Absolutely. Bishop, in our year-end review video, which will be posted on our YouTube channel here shortly, one event stuck out to me. As you were looking back and seeing all these, I'm like, "Oh boy, that was in the last year." It was the mass for the consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary that was called upon by Pope Francis, and then the bishops around the world celebrated mass for that same intention, and you did that here. It made me realize how long this fight and this war in Ukraine has been going on. The winter months are coming, and I'm assuming conditions are getting much harder for the fighters and the citizens who are suffering through that. I thought you might want to comment on that at the end of this year because that was such a and is such a poignant event.

Bishop Burbidge: Yes. And thank you. I think you raise a good point. Yeah, the conditions of the war, the weather are getting tougher. We were given a presentation at the

Bishop's Conference in November a short while ago, and it was mentioned that so many of the buildings, you don't think about this, throughout Ukraine have shattered windows and the glass factories are not operational right now. So the elements are flooding into residential buildings and the bitter cold is making life much harder for people who are already suffering so much. The speaker told us, "When you go home from the meeting, just open your window when it's the coldest and just leave it open for a half hour and see what that's like." And I did. And then you realize that, oh my goodness.

Billy Atwell: They live that way 24/7.

Bishop Burbidge: No windows, no windows. So just like that. But all the same is war, we have to pray for the end of it and continue to be united in that. So I know, I think it was in April the Biden administration announced the creation of Uniting for Ukraine. It's a streamlined process for displaced Ukrainians seeking to enter the United States. We know there's some challenges with this system of course, since it does not offer many services to those fleeing Ukraine, but it is also a step in the right direction as we come together as a nation to support our brothers and sisters who are in harm's way. So we have to be mindful of that reality too. But pray to God, the God of peace, the Prince of Peace, Jesus whose birth we're about to celebrate, can bring an end to this horror and the end of this loss of life and destruction of homes and properties. It's just so sad.

Billy Atwell: Absolutely. So we have a couple of questions from the faithful here. First one says, "Where are some of the more unique places you have celebrated Mass?" I believe you've celebrated mass for the Washington Nationals and for the incarcerated. Just two different groups there. Yeah. "What were those like?" They mentioned enjoying your mass at the Appaloosa Festival and the Diocesan Family Festival.

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah, that's true. Yeah, it's always a great privilege as Bishop to ... The best part is going to our parishes to be with the faithful of this diocese. I have privileges sometimes to celebrate Mass at the basilica shrines and holy places, and that's beautiful. But nothing gives me more joy than just being with the people here in our diocese. But you do get to do different masses. Going to celebrate Mass with the incarcerated is a very, very powerful experience. Many times, I have done that. I would celebrate Mass for the general population and then a separate Mass with those on death row.

Billy Atwell: Yeah, boy.

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah. And that is powerful. I mean, just getting to the place is unnerving. But then you get there and you're in a room with these individuals who are on death row and you see they're devout. They like to usually to pause after the homily to share their thoughts. So many times it's so inspiring. You forget that these individuals are someone's son, someone's daughter, someone's brother, someone's sister who have lives, who have made grave mistakes and are living

this life. But they find the grace and strength to persevere every day through their spiritual life. And when they get to have mass, the gratitude is like, wow, maybe we all should have that sense of gratitude. But if you go without mass for so long, you'll certainly do that.

And then you do fun things, celebrating Mass for the Nats. It's neat to be down in the stadium. You're having Mass in the press room where the manager's going to be out after the game doing the dance and things like that. But it helps you to realize even these superstars and things like that, they're mom and dads, they have crosses, they have blessings. All of us need God.

Billy Atwell: They need Jesus too.

Bishop Burbidge: And you just see that human side, which is so beautiful. But my greatest joy is being out in our parishes.

Billy Atwell: That's wonderful. So the next question is actually my question, but I'm doing it on a behalf of people who I think are wondering this themselves as they go into the holidays. So the question is, what advice do you have for people who are going to be visiting family or maybe friends, particularly those who they disagree with, maybe their family's not Catholic and they're going to harass them a little bit about that or they politically disagree. How do you manage those situations knowing that some are going to be walking into a less comfortable Christmas than they were hoping?

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah. First of all, I'm really surprised to hear that because everyone in my family always agrees and they never ask me hard questions or they never give me their opinion. So this really happens out in other places?

Billy Atwell: From time to time.

Bishop Burbidge: No, I actually hear that question a lot. And it's not no families. This is the reality of all families. We're a mixed bunch. Even last night after the penance service, talking to people outside, similar questions were asked. Well, I would say this, Billy. I would say, first of all, I think this is a unique time of year. Many of us are reunited with families that we don't see in real time. So I would say, let's begin with let's enjoy this time together. There's some things we can put aside for now. Even if it's serious, like bitterness or grudges, ask God to take that from you when you're with family members, and just enjoy this time together. Spend time together, learn about each other.

The questions we should be asking, I think Christmas day or Christmas eve or whatever, are not political views or ecclesial views or something like that, but, how are you doing? What's new in your life? Take an interest in each other. Reaffirm your love for one another. Enjoy each other's company. I would really suggest, we always want to defend our faith. We always want to share our faith, but we also have to be prudent. And if doing so creates an atmosphere of

tension, I don't think that's the way God wants us to celebrate his birthday. He wants it to be a happy occasion. But in a sense not to forget that you are witnessing to those who maybe you know disagree with what you believe or whose lifestyles you disagree with. But without attacking or being harsh or anything like that, you can witness in just allowing others to see your joy, the joy that is yours in being in relationship with Christ and your faith.

And sometimes you don't realize it, but people see that. And that might be the way that a door is opened or a window's open to a further conversation maybe the next day, maybe the next week. So I would just say, try to just enjoy each other's company, take interest in each other. We all, any of us and all of our families and everyone you'll be with at Christmas, there's a lot of distress out there. There's a lot of anxiety. We need to be lifting up each other and encouraging each other in mutual respect and love being a holy family. So enjoy each other's company. Keep the tension low. And maybe through your witness, open a window.

Billy Atwell: We were praying last night as a family. We always do let the kids offer their intentions. Some are pretty funny. And Angelina's was, "I hope Jesus has a nice birthday."

Bishop Burbidge: Oh, that's nice.

Billy Atwell: I thought that was cute. And then I thought, well, what does God want for his birthday? I think everything you just said is what he wants for his birthday, for us to set down our arms and be nice to each other and some peace for a little bit and show some joy. So Bishop, this is our last podcast for the year.

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah, it's hard to believe. It's hard to believe.

Billy Atwell: A lot happened this year, as I mentioned. But any final thoughts?

Bishop Burbidge: Yeah, just thank you everyone. Thanks for the goodness I'm seeing throughout our diocese of being attentive to one another, especially the needs of our brothers and sisters who are requiring our assistance. The generosity I'm seeing throughout our diocese, it's just absolutely incredible. The faith, the witness. So thank you all for your example. I do really wish all of you and your loved ones through the intercession of Mary and St. Joseph, a Christmas and a Christmas season filled with abundant blessings, spiritual gifts, and above all the peace of Christ that we all desire, that we all long for and that only Christ can give. May this precious gift be all of yours, and let's continue throughout the new year to walk humbly with our God.

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