

Snowballs from the Sidelines

Criticizing management is a popular sport in this country. I have played the game before, both in secular occupation and in the Church. It makes one feel sort of like a righteous victim to scoff at the best-laid plans of the boss or the management team . . . to regard them as so many buffoons.

Sometimes we speak of them as if we know better: We grumble and murmur with dismissive words which suggest that *"If I were in charge, things would be different! They would be better!"* But, as it is, I am not in charge and I have the luxury of "throwing snowballs" from the sidelines.

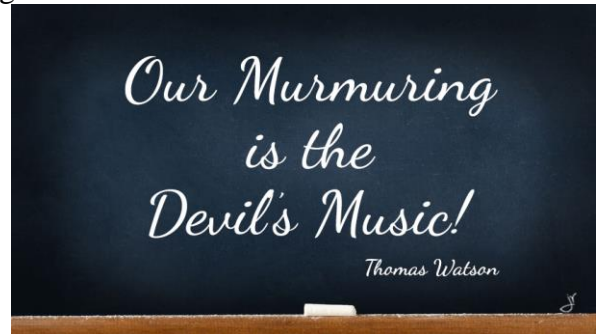
The latter is an expression I have heard spoken among the priests. I have always preferred "hand grenades" to "snowballs," but the latter are, surely, preferred due to their much less lethal nature.

Currently, in the diocese, we are undergoing a major effort in Pastoral and Strategic Planning; it is an effort in which I am intensely involved. After decades-worth of "kicking the can down the road" we are confronting a most complicated and fraught landscape: It is inescapable that some parishes, (mostly urban), will not survive for lack of people. New parishes will need to be formed out of the remains of two or more unsustainable ones. Hard decisions about worship sites, the sale of properties, the naming of new parishes and other matters will need to be made with sensitivity and courage.

Nevertheless, we are keenly aware of the grumbings and murmurings by priests on the sidelines. This only represents a certain, small subset who have not yet matured to see how unhelpful this sort of thing is. I suppose the matter looks rather simple to them and if they were in charge they would know exactly what to do. In their minds they envision "taking the bull by the horns" and straightening things out in the most decisive way. This regrettable arrogance issues forth in the "snowball throwing" which does nothing to help the problem, but only serves the ego.

I am not merely airing a grievance with these words or exonerating myself from similar activity: This is a widespread temptation both inside and outside the Church. It is something to be examined according to spiritual principles of our Sacred Tradition. Sometimes, of course, we have good reason to

grumble and complain when, for instance, someone is being clearly reckless or thoughtless or malicious. I am not addressing those occasions but, rather, those wherein a good-faith effort is being made to do the right thing. One may not always agree with every detail and one may have serious doubts about plans being formulated at the top. However, a good dose of humility is called for, especially when things are complicated or when events call for educated guesses or calculated risks. If your personal approach or opinion seems to be rejected or bypassed, it need not be taken as a personal slight.



With respect to the Bishop's plans for the diocese, I am rather 'agnostic:' I simply do not know the best approach to such enormous, difficult matters. I regard it my job to entrust myself to his judgment and to be as supportive as I can be with respect to his approach. I will not make the *perfect* the enemy of the *good*. Grumbling and murmuring will not be helpful to him or to the diocese or to any of the parishes. On the contrary, it is destructive and, very often, self-serving in much the same way gossip is.

At the parish level we are closing in on an effort to improve our physical plant, (especially Neumann Hall). This is one of those projects which could be undertaken in many possible ways on a spectrum ranging from very ambitious through modest unto very conservative. We have flexibility built into our thoughtfully crafted plan because we are not sure what the diocese will or will not allow. Everyone will have and does have an opinion and, as you well know, we won't be able to accommodate them all, (not even most of them). We can only pledge to do our best. So, with that pledge in mind, please try to avoid grumbling and murmuring in the coffee shops, breakfast stops and supermarket aisles. I guarantee an imperfect solution formulated by imperfect people.

C'est la vie. (That's French) *Deus escreve direito por linhas tortas.* (That's Portuguese).