

## THE CONTEMPLATION OF JUSTICE: RESPECTING OUR GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

All Minnesotans ought to know that Cass Gilbert (1859-1934) was the architect of our magnificent State Capitol (1895-1905) building. He also designed the principal buildings at The Saint Paul Seminary, as well as St. Clement Episcopal Church at 901 Portland Ave., located behind the Mitchell Hamline School of Law. Many who may know these details however, are unaware that his **final architectural project** (completed a year after his death) was the **U.S. Supreme Court**. Following his stint in the White House, former President William Taft became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the only person to hold both offices. There, he worked to secure a separate building for the Court, which had operated out of the U.S. Capitol. Taft never lived to see the building completed, but the project was well underway. To say that building has been in the news of late is a gross understatement.

In addition to the court room, offices for the Justices and their staff and an extensive library, the building also houses a basketball court on the fifth floor, appropriately dubbed “the highest court in the land”. Hey, I don’t write the jokes, nor can I explain the rationale for the gym, though it is wise to exercise prior to meting out justice! Set atop fifty-ton marble blocks and adorning the Court building are two statues by **James Earle Fraser**: one entitled *The Authority of Law* depicts a male figure, the other *The Contemplation of Justice*, a female. Born downriver in Winona, Fraser was trained at the **Ecole des Beaux-Arts** in Paris, just like **Emmanuel Masqueray**. In a letter to Gilbert, Fraser wrote about his ideas for the two statues: “I think...the figures must have a meaning, and not be perfunctory and purely decorative, and after seeing the **grandeur and simplicity** of the Supreme Court room, I feel more than ever that the figures in front of it should symbolize that feeling and be a prelude to the spirit of the building.”

He described the female figure as “a realistic conception of what I consider a heroic type of person with a head and body expressive of the beauty and intelligence of justice.” She holds a blindfolded figure in her right hand, symbolic that justice is truly impartial, impervious to favoritism due to any person, regardless of race, creed, color or socio-economic class. A book of law supports her left hand. Grandeur, simplicity, beauty, intelligence...these descriptors connote a certain dignity to this building because of what it represents. To contemplate means to gaze upon, to look hard at, to consider carefully. The wheels of justice take time! Truth is not easily ascertained in five-minute increments on national television. Contemplation happens neither in an instant nor in a vacuum.

In the spiritual realm, Catholicism also speaks of contemplation, though too many never experience it. Or if they do, it is only extremely infrequently, because we do not take the necessary time to fulfill its pre-requisites such that we are in a position even to receive these graces. In trying to answer the question “What is contemplative prayer?” the Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes **St. Teresa of Avila**: “Contemplative prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” (see CCC # 2709). It adds, “Contemplation is a *gaze* of faith, fixed on Jesus.” Saint Augustine notes: if “justice is that virtue which gives everyone his due ... where, then, is the justice of man, when he deserts the true God?” (*De civitate Dei*, XIX, 21). If I might humbly ask, “Where is justice when we disrespect our very institutions created to assure this justice?”

The U.S. Supreme Court maintains its own Police Force, yet they stood by while a protester defiantly climbed up upon the statue of *The Contemplation of Justice*. I suspect they did not want to invite a “scene” in which they would forcibly remove her. Why were people continually allowed to interrupt the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings and to shriek in the U.S. Senate Chambers, people who had absolutely no intention to maintain the decorum that one ought to expect in such venues? Or to furiously bang on the bronze doors of the Supreme Court? Because at least they were not damaging them? Ironically, the general behavior displayed on Saturday has actually been defended by the Supreme Court many times in its storied history. This includes an 8-1 decision in a 1961 case that overturned the arrests of protesters who had gathered outside the State House in South Carolina to peacefully articulate their grievances in the area of Civil Rights. Since their protest was peaceful and they posed no danger, the Supreme Court ruled that their rights ought to be upheld.

How ought we to “contemplate justice” today, justice both for the **accuser** and the **accused** alike? What does it even look like following this entire debacle? One may legitimately ask, “And what exactly do I owe my neighbor?” Do we presume the good will of others? Do we owe people a presumption of innocence in this nation? Do we owe it to others to hear their stories, to seriously consider their claims in a spirit of justice? And how do we inculcate a genuine respect for our government institutions, institutions that 80,000 militia and Continental Army soldiers fought to establish. May God preserve our institutions and bless our nation and together, may we make the necessary efforts to seriously examine our national conscience, contemplate justice and move forward as one nation under God.

- Last week’s Cathedral Heritage Foundation’s **Festival of Lights** was extremely successful. We raised significant funds to begin to restore approximately 2/3 of the stained-glass windows above the confessionals (six) and the Bancel LaFarge windows in the Shrines of the Nations (twelve). Deo Gratias! This project will proceed gradually, and we hope to complete the fundraising to do all eighteen!
- The troubles of the Church continue in **Ireland**. The draft legislation for the **new abortion law** provides for doctors and nurses to opt out of providing abortion, but requires that, in such cases, they refer the patient to a colleague who will perform the procedure. That is what we call in moral theology “mediate material cooperation,” in this case through a direct referral. Catholic doctors and nurses simply may not cooperate in this manner, and the Bishops there are trying to effect changes in the law.
- Last Saturday, the Vatican announced steps Pope Francis is taking with respect to an **objective assessment** of the Archbishop McCarrick scandal. The statement even hints that “from the examination of the facts and of the circumstances, it may emerge that choices were taken that would not be consonant with a contemporary approach to such issues.” Though not the apostolic visitation that the USCCB leadership requested, it represents a positive step forward should it provide actionable information that will lead to transparency and accountability.
- In a lengthy ceremony sixty years ago today, Archbishop William Brady **solemnly consecrated** the Cathedral of Saint Paul. Canon Law required waiting until substantial completion before the solemn ceremony could take place. It is safe to say, it was worth the wait!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector

