

July 20, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

- This letter will NOT be 5 pages long like last week's epistle!

- You may remember (if you read last week's letter!) that I mentioned that a group of Roman Catholic Representatives from the US House had petitioned the US Bishops' Conference to voice more loudly its stand on the war in Iraq. The Bishops Conference responded to the Representatives this week:

"Our Conference hopes to work with the Congress and the Administration to forge bipartisan policies on ways to bring about a responsible transition and an end to the war," said Bishop Thomas Wenski (USCCB International Justice and Peace Committee Chairman) in a July 17 letter to Rep. Tim Ryan (D/Ohio) and 13 other Catholic members of the House. He pointed to numerous Church statements that the bishops have made about the Iraqi situation.

"Too many Iraqi and American lives have been lost. Too many Iraqi communities have been shattered. Too many civilians have been driven from their homes. The human and financial costs of the war are staggering. Representatives of our Conference welcome the opportunity to meet with you and other policy makers to discuss ways to pursue the goal of a 'responsible transition' to bring an end to the war in Iraq," Bishop Wenski said.

"The current situation in Iraq is unacceptable and unsustainable, as is the policy and political stalemate among decision makers in Washington," Bishop Wenski said.

"Our shared moral tradition can guide this effort and inform our dialogue with other leaders as we seek a way to bring about a morally responsible end to the war in Iraq," he added

For the full text of the Bishops' letter, go to [www.USCCB.org](http://www.USCCB.org) and then click on "News."

- In this week's Boston Globe (July 19) Ms. Sheila Rauch Kennedy has an op-ed piece in which she writes, "A decade ago, the Catholic Church tried to annul my marriage." Not quite... It's helpful in understanding the complexity of annulments to know "who does what" in such a process. More than a decade ago Joseph Kennedy petitioned the Church to study his marriage to Sheila Rauch, asking if such a study might lead to a *declaration of nullity* regarding their marriage. Kennedy sought the Church's judgment on his marriage; the Church did not seek to annul that relationship. In fact, the Church has a role as *Defender of the Bond of Marriage* and marriages are considered to be valid until shown to be otherwise.

The Church does not *annul* marriages but rather studies those presented by petitioners, finding some (even many) marriages to have never been equal to what the Church understands marriage to be and what the Church expects of those who enter into it. The distinction here may seem too fine but it's an important one. In the same way that students flunk a course when their knowledge of the subject matter is tested and judged to be less than what the school and teacher expected; in the same way that a Medical Examiner pronounces death after determining that a life has ended and the causes for it: in the same

way does the Church study a failed marriage and make a decision about the validity of that union, investigating the causes for its breakup and particularly any realities which jeopardized the marriage and/or its parties prior to its solemnization. (Note: one cannot request a Tribunal study of a marriage unless there has already been a civil divorce.)

We often say that Professor Green *flunked* Bob White when what we mean is that Bob flunked the course and his teacher determined the grade evaluating Bob's performance. At a death or autopsy, we do *not* say that the Medical Examiner *killed* the deceased but that the ME officially declared the state of the body and the causes for its demise. So, a Church tribunal studies a failed marriage and renders a decision about the state of that marriage *vis a vis* the Church's understanding of marriage and its expectations of those who enter into it. The Church then does not annul marriages but rather makes a formal declaration concerning those marriages which, after study, are found to be null.

My purpose here is neither to question the outcome of the Rauch-Kennedy case nor to evaluate the work of Church Tribunals. My purpose is simply to dispel the notions that Chanceries have stacks of annulments which are doled out to those requesting them.

- In spite of the schedule still indicated on our parish bulletin, we now have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament once a week, on Tuesdays. The former Wednesday nighttime seems to have proved to be not a good one for many people. If you are interested in regularly spending an hour in prayer in Church before the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, please let us know what day and what time of day would be best for you. If we find that there are a suitable number of people interested in gathering for such prayer at the same time, we would be happy to add that to the parish schedule. You can let me know through email at **FrAustinFleming@aol.com** or you can mail me at 55 Church Street, Concord, MA 01742.

- At the end of this week I will begin two weeks vacation. Fr. Vin Burke will be here for the weekend liturgies and funerals and for other pastoral needs should they arise. I will spend the first week of my vacation in Hyannis by myself and the second week with two priest friends in a condo we have rented in Provincetown, up on the hill and with a roof deck from which to peacefully survey the ocean!

Sincerely,  
Fr. Fleming