

Happy Monday to all,

On this date, December 15, in 1939, the iconic movie "Gone With The Wind" premiered in Atlanta, GA. The film offered a complex social reflection- romanticizing the antebellum South as a beautiful, lost world while whitewashing slavery's brutality and depicting Black characters through stereotypes.

Northerners, and the political changes they were implementing, were seen as an existential threat to the Southern way of life. Landowners in the south rallied to secede from the Union based on false narratives and fantasized nostalgia for a time and society that really never existed.

Political narratives from both sides, focused on the issue of slavery, caused a growing national division based on mistrust, intolerance, and hate between northern and southern citizens. Neither side fought for a truly moral and righteous cause. Neither side fought for the protection of all human life and the dignity of every person. The conclusion of the war may have ended the legalization of chattel slavery, but it definitely did not end the functional enslavement of humans within the U.S.

Today the United States is once again experiencing intense polarization. We are deeply divided on a range of issues, including immigration, civil rights, government assistance, and even the authority of the courts. Voters from both major parties are beginning to view the other as a clear and present danger to democracy.

This time, the concern is not an organized civil war but rather a growing increase in political violence and acts of terrorism perpetrated by lone actors or extremist groups. Some influential political leaders are fueling the fire. Both sides see themselves as fighting for survival, and both accuse the other of crossing the line.

In September 2025, Bishop Myron Cotta released a statement addressing the rise in acts of political violence taking place throughout our nation.

<https://stocktondiocese.org/bishopsmessages>

In the statement he wrote:

*Politicians, media figures, and other public figures must stop using these tragedies to further divide us. Rhetoric that fosters hatred or creates an 'us vs. them' mentality poisons our communities and erodes trust. Instead, our leaders should seek to heal divisions, unite neighbors, families, and co-workers, and work for the common good of all.*

Catholic social teaching defines the common good of all as the sum of social conditions allowing individuals and groups to achieve their full potential, emphasizing human dignity, mutual care, and the well-being of all. Most of us don't live in the extremes. We trust our neighbors and local leaders. We help one another without hesitation when tragedy strikes. We work on solutions

that are fair and will move us all forward. It is time to take the microphone away from extremists on either side.

I do not believe that our society is at risk of becoming the dystopian world I read about at age 14 in George Orwell's book, *1984*- a society controlled by propaganda, surveillance, disinformation, and denial of truth. Neither do I believe that our society is at risk of becoming a socialist Utopia – an atheistic society with communal living, shared resources, abolition of private property, and equitable wealth distribution free from capitalism's inequalities. False narratives suggesting that we are at the cusp of either social order only perpetuate fear and mistrust.

Catholic social teaching promotes a "third way" that seeks social justice, solidarity, and a concern for the poor through a regulated market economy that puts human dignity and the common good at its center... not politics, products, and profits.

As a people of faith it is imperative that we do all that we can to support organizations (such as our local Catholic Charities) and to be inspired by the words of our leaders (such as Bishop Cotta), and to cling to the guidance of those who live outside of false narratives and nostalgic fantasies. We cannot afford to take the position of Scarlett O'Hara in "*Gone With the Wind*", using her famous words, "Fiddle-dee-dee! I'll think about that tomorrow" to avoid problems by deferring them. In the spirit of Advent, let us do all that we can to promote hope, peace, joy, and love.

Blessings to all.

Deacon Mike