

Happy Monday to all,

This week, led by the Holy Spirit, I am going to deviate a little from my typical format. Today I focus on a historical event that happened only one week ago from today (April 13, 2026). Hopefully it will serve as a good teaching moment.

On April 13, 2026, Pope Leo XIV told reporters that he has "no fear of the Trump administration." Just hours earlier, President Donald Trump posted harsh words against the pontiff via social media, stating that Pope Leo should "get his act together as Pope and use common sense. "The president called Pope Leo weak on crime and terrible on foreign policy, claiming he [Trump] was the sole reason that Pope Leo was elected in the first place.

In response Pope Leo said, "I don't want to get into a debate with him. I don't think that the message of the Gospel is meant to be abused in the way that some people are doing."

But...as unsettling as all of this may be...it was the remarks of V.P. Vance that led me to write today's Musing.

Identifying as a "devout Catholic" and frequently referencing Catholic Social Teaching in his political ideology, the V.P took it upon himself to define the boundaries of a Pope and cautioned Pope Leo to basically stay in his lane. V.P. Vance stated,

"The president has the prerogative to set American foreign policy, he's got the prerogative to set American immigration policy. He has to look out for the interests of the United States of America, and that inevitably means that when the Vatican comments on issues of public policy, sometimes there's going to be agreement, of course, and sometimes there's going to be disagreement. In some cases, it would be best for the Vatican to stick to matters of morality, to stick to matters of what's going on in the Catholic church."

It is disappointing to me, as one who frequently navigates the line between political public policy and non-political moral theology, that Mr. Vance used his public forum to egregiously misrepresent Pope Leo's words and actions as politically based and designed to usurp our nation's right to set policy.

Pope Leo's words and actions have always reflected matters of morality. Without ever suggesting specific modifications of national policy, the Pope only speaks out when the consequences of the policies result in immoral outcomes.

It is the role of our religious leaders to speak out against infringements of the dignity of the human person, denial of the right to life from conception to natural death, words and actions that impede human solidarity resulting in significant division and discord, incite violence rather than peace and reconciliation, place the environment at risk, and do not provide the essentials of basic human existence especially to the poor and marginalized. A policy may be well intentioned but the impact of the policy on the human person is 100% a moral issue.

In addition to the moral guidance provided by Pope Leo, other religious leaders have spoken out.

Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated, "I am disheartened that the President chose to write such disparaging words about the Holy Father.

Pope Leo is not his rival; nor is the Pope a politician. He is the Vicar of Christ who speaks from the truth of the Gospel and for the care of souls."

Our own Bishop Myron Cotta, previously stated, "To truly proclaim Christ's victory over death, we must not be indifferent to the suffering in the world. This Easter season, let us remember that to be pro-life is to have respect and reverence for all human life. Let us cast aside our divisions and not allow hatred or indifference to take root in our hearts".

Catholic Charities of Stockton works diligently every day to promote the teachings of the Church when engaging with each and every person who comes to us for help. Public policy comes and goes, government funding is always fluid, and political administrations may be more or less favorable to non-profit agencies that serve all people without consideration of their social status. We navigate all of this by remaining adherent to the very guidance that continues to come from the moral authority of our religious leaders.

We rely on the generosity and support of the people of the diocese of Stockton to continue to do all that we do.

I conclude with additional words from Bishop Myron Cotta regarding our moral obligation to serve all who are in need. He states,

"I encourage all the faithful in our diocese to:

- Pray for an end to all wars
- Reject language that fuels division
- Promote understanding and uphold the dignity of every person
- Live the mission of the Church in your daily lives
- "May the light of the Risen Christ be a beacon for world leaders, leading them to find the wisdom and courage to comfort those in despair, protect the vulnerable, and inspire all people to seek justice and peace on Earth."

Blessings,

Deacon Mike