

Walk Humbly Podcast – Episode 119

Bishop Michael Burbidge: [00:00:00] This is Bishop Michael Burbidge, and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.

Billy Atwell: Podcasting from the St. Clare Studios here in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to the Walk Humbly Podcast. I'm Billy Atwell, Chief Communications Officer for the Diocese and your co-host. If you have a question for Bishop Burbidge that we can possibly answer on this podcast, send it to info@arlingtondiocese.org or send us a message on social media. A couple plugs before we get rolling here. We have a Mass for Respect Life Month that's going to be celebrated at St. Joseph's Parish in Alexandria. That's on October 29 at 11 a.m. And we've got our Jubilee Year Three Vespers coming up. It's on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe.

It's at St. Michael Parish in Annandale. That's on Sunday, November 26 at 5 p.m. We've got some important topics here. We're going to talk about the war in Israel, the diocesan pilgrimage to Emmitsburg, Maryland that just took place. We're going to talk more about Respect Life Month and our sacred duty to vote. The [00:01:00] Synod in Rome is underway—the Synod of Bishops—and Pope Francis issues an apostolic exhortation on human and environmental ecology.

So I welcome your host, Bishop Burbidge. Bishop, how have you been?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Billy, I am doing well. October, as you mentioned, is a very busy month, celebrating many great initiatives in the life of our Church, and certainly the highest priority throughout this month is this Respect Life Month celebration. I also am looking forward to Sunday, celebrating the wedding anniversary Mass.

Billy Atwell: That's right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: It always is such an inspiration to me when I see so many years of faithful married love present in one church. And again, we thank all of our married couples for their daily renewal of their “yes” to what they promised God and to one another.

Billy Atwell: Absolutely.

Billy Atwell: Bishop, we were all stunned when we witnessed the terrorist attacks against Israel by Hamas militants, followed by their attempt at invasion from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

Israel [00:02:00] officially declared war on October 8. The initial attack came 50 years after the Yom Kippur War. Thousands of lives have been lost, many have been captured and Hamas is threatening to kill more hostages, among them U. S. citizens. I'm just curious—what's your reaction to the story, especially as it's developing and ongoing?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Yeah sure. Like all of our listeners, I'm sure it's with great pain that we watch what is happening in Israel and Palestine. So many people killed, others wounded. We pray for those families who saw a feast day turn into a day of mourning. And also hostages—praying for their immediate release.

Like our listeners I'm sure, watching the news, it is just unimaginable to think of what the Israeli people have endured at the hands of Hamas. We have to be clear, what Hamas has done is nothing less than terrorism. It is barbaric. And Israel was the victim of an unjust and [00:03:00] brutal attack.

So many killed and suffering in such a vicious way. And so we must stand up. We must be clear in our support for Israel and our condemnation of the actions of Hamas. I also join with Pope Francis, who says that it is true. It is the right of those who are attacked to defend themselves.

But we are also very worried by the total siege (in which Palestinians live) in Gaza, where there have been many innocent victims. So in the right to defend itself, we have to make sure that we pray that everything is done to make sure that the innocent are also protected at the value of human life.

So it's a very alarming, very difficult situation, this time. We have to be united in prayer that the Lord, who has the power, will transform hearts from evil to good and from [00:04:00] hate to love and bring an end to this war and all this unnecessary violence and the Lord has the power to do that.

So we have to be united. I'm asking all of our listeners, all the faithful in the Diocese to pray daily for the gift of peace. That's the only way peace will be, and dialogue is important. All those things are so important. But the resolution only comes through the peace Christ can give.

Billy Atwell: Boy, the peace in this world is so fragile, it requires constant prayer, to have any hope that it would continue.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And we've seen that, throughout the world, including what we've seen in Ukraine and other areas of such violence. You're right, Billy. Absolutely.

Billy Atwell: Bishop, we had a wonderful and celebratory event. It was one of our key Jubilee events of the year and was the diocesan pilgrimage to Emmitsburg, to the Shrine of Elizabeth Ann Seton as well as to the college there—to the Mount. I was curious, what were your thoughts on how it went? It seemed to be a pretty significant turnout, which was great to see. As their shepherd, what were you thinking as you guided all these people through?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Billy, it was [00:05:00] truly inspiring from the very first moment—nine o'clock—with so many buses pulling up, so many cars, over 13–1,400 people were there.

And what I was grateful for was that the face of the Diocese was represented. There were people of all ages, young and old. There were people from every region of our diocese. All the multicultural communities in our diocese were represented. The sick and the healthy were there. And the most beautiful part for me was that people came, not as tourists.

They came as pilgrims. And throughout the day, it was just so beautiful to hear, people whispering in my ear at the beginning of the day. The burdens, the crosses, the sufferings that they were bringing to the Lord and also to our Blessed Mother and to the powerful intercession of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. And to hear at the end [00:06:00] of the day, as people were departing, the peace that they found. Not that their crosses automatically disappeared, but they found new strength, new consolation to carry them. It was truly miraculous in many ways. And there's no doubt Our Lady wanted us to be there because the weather forecast was not called to be all that great.

But when we got to her shrine, the sun was shining. There was a warm and gentle breeze. It was just so beautiful. How blessed are we to be Catholic? We began the day by learning with a beautiful talk on St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, I encourage our listeners to learn more about her. Then we had the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. So many of our priests, through their great generosity, were available for Confessions.

And then we made our way to the Grotto, where we had the blessing of relics, I mean the veneration of relics, the blessings of religious goods, [00:07:00] religious articles that so many people brought that day—bought that day. I say that I think the only ones happier than I was on that day were the owners of the gifts.

Yeah, but then we had a beautiful Eucharistic procession, seeing people trying to walk up that hill, following Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with walkers, canes, people helping others. It was just a reminder of that life here on Earth is indeed a pilgrimage, and it's Jesus leading, we who follow and also, God-willing, to the same destination.

Life with God forever in Heaven with our Blessed Mother and all the angels and saints. So, it was just a powerful day. I'm so grateful to Father Stephen Vaccaro and Father Jonathan Smith.

Billy Atwell: They did such a great job.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Oh, they did a wonderful job. Everything was so well planned, organized—good timeframe. Father Hathaway, our Jubilee Committee, so many people worked so very hard to provide this day. And I said [00:08:00] the fruits and the blessings of this day are yet to be known. Blessings will continue to come from it.

Billy Atwell: That's great, that's wonderful. So, we're in the midst of Respect Life Month and we are approaching a really critical election year.

I think that it's providential this year that we are celebrating Respect Life Month leading up to an election like this. A lot of people think about the presidential election a year out. But every seat in the Virginia legislature is up for grabs this year. So, what is your hope for Catholics when they hit the voting booth on November 7? What is your hope for them?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Well Billy, thank you for reminding us what is at stake in the Commonwealth of Virginia this year. This is an election like no other with all those seats available. And Catholics are reminded of the sacred duty, first of all, to vote.

We have to have Catholics make it known what we hold dear in the public arena. And what better way than the way we vote and choose those who represent us. [00:09:00] And so it's very important for Catholics to, first of all,

get out there and, if we're going to be victorious and have people uphold all we believe to be true and good, then we have to win.

Yeah. And so one of the ways you do that is—in this day and age, it's a little bit different than in years past—is to vote early. I really suggest that we, as Catholics, we make our voice known, we get that voice out there, we vote early, we see if we can assist our neighbors or fellow parishioners who are unable to vote, either by taking them to the booths or maybe arranging for them to do so.

Billy Atwell: It's like an act of mercy for someone who otherwise can't make it there, to make it possible for them to make sure their voice is still heard.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Exactly. And then, as always, to be citizens who know the issues, to know who the candidates are, and what the candidates are saying, to learn, not just to listen to headlines or blogs.

But of course, Billy, and what a wonderful time to be reminded in Respect Life Month that the preeminent issue is always the [00:10:00] protection of all human life, lifting up the sacredness of human life, especially the preborn and the vulnerable who cannot protect themselves. If we get that wrong, then...then that's just the path we don't want to travel.

Billy Atwell: What matters if that one doesn't matter?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Right, exactly.

Billy Atwell: Because sometimes I feel like people get a little nervous when it comes to election issues, because there are so many issues going on and we'll be told by the media, “This is the issue of the time, this is the one that really matters.”

As Catholics though, we start with different fundamental principles. And you're saying, “Life is the starting point, how could we not begin with that?” But I think some people struggle with that because they hear all these other issues. What would be your recommendation for them as they prepare to go and vote?

How do they organize these different issues and factor them in?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Like you said, you have to make sure that we get the foundation right. And it all begins with the protection of life. It does. And then, if you get that right, then everything else is going to follow. If you believe

that, then it's going to be enacted in other ways—of how [00:11:00] we treat the poor, of how we treat the vulnerable, of how we provide facilities and care.

It all follows from that. And we—as Catholics—we have some good candidates out there who are willing to stand up for everything we hold to be true. But they need support because they are being attacked.

Billy Atwell: Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: It's vicious how they're being attacked. And what is really sad to learn is how the rest of the country knows this is a very important election in Virginia.

And so Planned Parenthood, for example, is pouring millions of dollars into our election. That's right. And so are other entities outside of Virginia as far as from California.

Billy Atwell: And ask ourselves, “Why is that?”

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Right. And to, make sure that the candidates who are upholding the protection and sacredness of all human life are defeated.

So, that's why we have to be so proactive in our prayers and our support and our advocacy and [00:12:00] getting out there and voting.

Billy Atwell: And some people get frustrated. They say “The Church should be telling me who to vote for. Do that work for me. Just tell me who.” But that's not and has never been the function of the Church.

We're there to provide moral guidance. We're shepherded by our pastor for a reason and to provide moral guidance on what those issues are. But we've never had a political home. There is no party that perfectly fits the bill for us. And that's the difficult, but important job of the faithful—to prudently decide which candidate best represents, because it's going to vary, and you're not going to have every election that simple or clear-cut.

And so, it's the role of the faithful to decide: Which individual is really representing my most fundamental values, maybe even beyond that?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Yeah, you wish one candidate checked every single box that we want. That's going to be very rare. The Papist Party doesn't exist. So where will the most good be done?

Billy Atwell: Right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Where will the most good be done? And again, we know where it all begins. But in another way, Billy, at the same time, I think candidates are making it easier and easier for us because they're drawing the line [00:13:00] in the sand and you listen to them. You listen to what candidates are saying. They draw the line in the sand, and in many ways there's the choice between good and evil here.

Billy Atwell: Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And so, listen to what candidates are saying. They're making our job easier—who it is that will really do the most good for the preborn, for the vulnerable, for the poor and for our Commonwealth.

Billy Atwell: And for religious freedom and rights of speech.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Religious freedom and rights of speech, exactly.

Billy Atwell: There's a lot on the line. Thank you for that, Bishop. Bishop, with so much happening in the world, we cannot overlook a major priority of the Holy Father and thus the universal Church. And this is the Synod of Bishops taking place in Rome. The three themes of the Synod are communion, participation and mission.

We've been participating in this Synod locally and maybe you'll share a little bit about what that means, but bring us up to speed on what we should know about what's going on here with the Synod.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: The Synod is underway. Cardinals, bishops, priests, religious laity from all around [00:14:00] the world gathering as Church. The Holy Father has made it crystal clear that the principal agent of the Synod is the Holy Spirit.

Who continues to guide and inspire and lead his Church. Our job and all the delegates who are at the Synod is to listen. To put themselves in a disposition to listen to one another, of course. But ultimately, in and through prayer, to let the Holy Spirit guide us.

That's why it was beautiful that the Synod began—and I heard from a couple of the bishops who are on the Synod—that it began with retreat. And they said it

was really a beautiful experience and a calming factor came throughout that body of people who are gathering.

The Holy Father says over and again: “This is not like a parliamentary meeting or a plan of reformation.” He says, “No, we're here to walk together with the gaze of Jesus,” he says, “who blesses the father and welcomes those who are [00:15:00] weary and oppressed.” So he says, “Let us start with the gaze of Jesus, which is a blessing for us and a blessing to the Church.”

He says, “The Synod is not a parliament where the ideas of opposing parties will be debated and voted up and down along party lines. A synod is a journey that the Holy Spirit—he makes. So, constant prayer and listening are necessary to follow the path the Spirit indicates.” So, I think we should, relax here.

Sometimes you read these headlines and blogs and people think, “Oh, the Church doctrine and teaching is going to be changed.” That's not what this is all about. It's about how we as a Church can bring the truth of the Gospel to others in a time when we know many people are wandering away from it and are actually wandering away from Mother Church.

That's what the Holy Spirit wants. How can we bring people back home to Mother Church? What are the ways that we can [00:16:00] do that? And it begins with listening, which we did leading up to the Synod.

Billy Atwell: Yeah, ‘cause there were different phases of this. It started with the diocesan phase, then episcopal conference, universal and continental.

And so, we had a lot of those—what were some of the key issues you heard here locally? What stands out to you? ‘Cause there was a lot of issues brought, you heard some common threads.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And like you said, we've already had a voice in the Synod because I was able to summarize what I heard throughout those listening sessions.

And what we hear the most is the need for a church to be more welcoming, to think of practical ways that, when someone does return to church, they feel that they are welcomed into the community, right? It can be as simple as a greeting. “Oh, it's great to see you,” or whatever.

Or, some people sadly share the experience of sometimes trying to make arrangements for a baptism or a marriage or something like that. And it's not the

joyful welcome and embrace that, that it should be.[00:17:00] And we heard the importance of improving the way that we preach and teach the truth so that it is constantly understandable for people to bring out into their workplaces and their communities.

A lot of people said to us that, with all the complicated issues that we're dealing with today—from transgender and from abortion and from all these things—they believe what the Church teaches, but they don't feel equipped on how to convey that into a world and to neighbors and fellow workers who are sometimes hostile.

Billy Atwell: Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And to have that right language to articulate. A lot that we heard during listening sessions was, “We're ready Bishop. we're ready to go. Give me the tools.”

Billy Atwell: What you just shared is what I heard the most at the sessions I attended. It's “I know it, I just don't really understand how to bring it forward, how to carry it forward.”

The other thing is, they wanted to hear more of the good news coming from the Church, because there has been so much bad [00:18:00] news stories coming out over the last 20 years that they said, “We know there's good news stories. Just hand them off to us so that we can run with them.” And so that, in communication, that's been a major responsibility.

But those things that you've heard have also been woven into the Strategic Plan, and the goals that we're setting, and the plans that we have coming forward on that. So, I think people are going to be very—especially people who attended the sessions—they're going to be excited to hear what they voice, not just reflected probably at the Synod of Bishops once it's gone through those other phases, but here locally. Those were listened to, and we're putting plans behind it.

It's really an exciting time to be, not just a Catholic, but a part of this diocese because there's a lot of road ahead of us.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And like you said, even in the issue of abortion, when I speak to people, we're using the theme “radical solidarity,” meaning we are one with the mother and child. And then when we tell people, “How is it that we're with the mother, especially those in crisis pregnancies? How are we

with her every step of the way?” We're there to provide the basic necessities that she [00:19:00] does not have for her child: food and clothing and diapers, all those kinds of things.

We're there to provide homes, housing for single moms, counseling—we're there to even offer adoption so that abortion does not have to be a choice. We're there with the mom and the people are saying, “Bishop, this is what we need to hear more. This is the good news that we,” like you said, Billy, “this is the good news we can bring to others so that people know—of course, we're against abortion, taking an innocent life—but here's how we are pro-life.”

Billy Atwell: And one that always stands out to me, too, is Mother of Mercy Clinic. We have obstetricians that are helping out there. We have two ultrasound machines. This is a full-service operation now, where, whether it's a spiritual need or a physical need, the Church is there to help.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And people of all faith.

Billy Atwell: Oh yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: And again, as we always say on this podcast—only possible through the grace of God, but also through the goodness and generosity of the great faithful in this diocese who allow us to carry on these ministries.

Billy Atwell: Oh, absolutely.

Billy Atwell: [00:20:00] Just a day before this latest stage of the Synod, the gathering in Rome, Pope Francis published an apostolic exhortation called “Laudate Deum” which built off the encyclical “Laudato Si’.” So, share with us your thoughts on this apostolic exhortation and what it means for the Church.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Yeah. And again, I always encourage people to read—it's readily available—to read it at length themselves, to see exactly what the Holy Father is saying. It's pretty basic what the Holy Father is saying. And he's reminding us what we know to be true: that God is the creator, and we are the creatures.

And we have been entrusted with a stewardship of this precious gift that God has given us, the care for creation. And we can do that, and he's calling for us to do that globally. He's calling us to do that through our policies that we enact as a country or as a nation.

But he's also calling us to be good stewards in our [00:21:00] own homes, in our own neighborhoods, in our own communities. And we have taken that call very seriously as we continue our own buildings and projects and development of different projects throughout our diocese. And so, the Holy Father is just reminding us what the Lord, our God said from the beginning: This beautiful gift of creation is entrusted to you. Be good stewards.

Billy Atwell: Absolutely. Yeah. And I think about some of those parish projects that you've authorized. So, our construction office will partner with the parishes to have high-efficiency HVAC units and water heaters. They installed solar panels on many roofs—you think about all the roof space between schools and parishes.

There's a lot of roof space there that can be utilized, which is a huge cost savings for them too. So not only is it care for creation, but it's also great cost savings. And new construction is factoring in things like natural light, proper insulation, how can the architecture also reduce the need for energy consumption and those things.

And so, this is an ongoing mission. It's one that I know you take seriously and we're implementing here locally and it's beautiful to see it be a growing mission [00:22:00] here at the Diocese.

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Yeah. And the Holy Father—it doesn't often happen—gets into the weeds a little bit. He gets into some specific things that we can be doing.

Billy Atwell: He's very specific. It's very good to read. So that's why it's an apostolic exhortation. It builds off of that encyclical. So again, it's “Laudate Deum” and that built off of “Laudato Si’.” It's good to read both of them 'cause “Laudato Si’” lays that theological foundation, then it brings you into the action items he conveys through that apostolic exhortation.

Just a reminder, if you're listening to this podcast, you're benefiting from the generosity of all those who have given to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal throughout the years, particularly this most recent year. And there's the Vocations Office, school's office, marriage and family life, Respect Life.

There's so many offices—Planning, Construction and Management, like we were just talking about, but Communications is one of those. You've made this possible. We just want to say, thank you so much. If you haven't yet, please make sure you rate this podcast or write a review wherever you're listening. If

you're listening through our YouTube channel, subscribe and ring the notifications bell.

We post a lot of great content there on a regular [00:23:00] basis. Sign up for our e-newsletter at arlingtondiocese.org. You can follow Bishop Burbidge on X, formerly known as Twitter, @bishopburbidge, where every day you can read a short Gospel reflection for that day. And we also post on Bishop Burbidge's Instagram account—a lot of different quotes and clips from homilies, speeches and keynotes, radio spots, and different things. So, please go to his Instagram account there, @bishopmichaelburbidge.

And if you are looking to get out and vote, you are looking to be more informed on the issues, go to vacatholic.org for the Virginia Catholic Conference website.

That is the body that represents Bishop Knestout in Richmond and Bishop Burbidge in Arlington on the different political matters going on here in the Commonwealth. This is an amazing opportunity in this Respect Life Month to advocate for the unborn and the vulnerable. Go to vacatholic.org to learn more.

Bishop, if you would give us any final thoughts and then send us off with your blessing?

Bishop Michael Burbidge: Just to ask all the faithful in the Diocese, all who are listening to this podcast [00:24:00] to be united in prayer for peace throughout our world, the peace that only Christ can give, the one who promises and says, “Behold, I make all things new.”

So, let us put our trust in God's promise and walk humbly with our God. Thank you for listening to the Walk Humbly podcast. Make sure you check out more episodes on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher and Spotify. You can follow me on Twitter @bishopburbidge, where I offer Gospel reflections each morning and share photos and updates of what is going on in the Diocese of Arlington.

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