

Bishop Michael Burbidge (00:00):

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge, and you are listening to the Walk Humbly podcast.

Billy Atwell (00:08):

Podcasting from the St. Clare Studio here in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to the Walk Humbly podcast. My name's Billy Atwell. I'm the chief communications officer for the diocese and your co-host. If you have a question for Bishop Burbidge you would like considered for the podcast, send it to info@arlingtondiocese.org or send us a message on social media. I welcome your host, Bishop Burbidge. Bishop, how've you been?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (00:29):

Billy, I am doing well. We had a great Holy Week, Holy Triduum and Easter, and I've heard so many wonderful reports from our pastors, the number of people who celebrated Easter with their families, with their parishes, the number of people who have been received in the church, baptized, confirmed, First Holy Communion, full communion. So a lot of great news. I was at the convention center in Fredericksburg. St. Mary's Church is small and doesn't have great parking, so they rent the convention center, and they told me there's going to be like 3,500 people. And I have to admit, I said, "I'm not so sure that that's the right number." There were at least 3,500 people, and that was just one Mass.

Billy Atwell (01:18):

They had multiple Masses there, yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (01:18):

They had multiple Masses. But it was just so joyful and reverent, so good news. I think people living in this world today know there's a lot of empty promises that the world gives, and people are searching and they're looking for truth and they're looking for life, new life, and the new life that our Risen Lord gives to us. So just to remind our listeners that Easter's a season, and throughout the weeks of the Easter season, I wish our listeners continued blessings, but most especially the peace of our Risen Lord.

Billy Atwell (01:53):

Absolutely. You mentioned Holy Week. Well, at the beginning of Holy Week, we were all stunned when we saw the tragic news out of Baltimore that the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed into the Patapsco River. It was a Singapore container ship that hit it. So some people were saved, but another six are believed to have perished. They haven't recovered everybody, but there's no reason to believe that they made it through that. What were your thoughts when you saw that news?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (02:18):

Yeah. I'm sure like everyone else, Billy, just great, great sadness. What a tragedy. What a tragedy. It shows you that life is very fragile, that each day is a new gift. We're mourning the potential loss of lives, as you said, praying for those who have not been recovered. Their families, I mean the heartbreak of their families, just praying that God gives them consolation and strength. Praying, also--a lot of people will be impacted economically by this tragedy as well. The loss of life, of course, is the most tragic of all results of this collapse, but for many months to come, thousands of people who rely on the port for their livelihood, we have to keep them in prayer, too, that our elected officials begin to work together and begin this rebuild, this recovery as soon as possible.

Billy Atwell (03:15):

Yeah. We were thinking about Easter. A colleague made an interesting point that we can't contain all of the joy and the peace of Easter into a single day, so we get a whole season for that. I was curious, as the faithful enter into this, you had spoken a lot about Lent and approaching Easter. Well, now that we're past Easter, what is it that you hope, what is your message maybe for the faithful as we continue into this Easter season?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (03:39):

New life, new life. The evil one wants us to think that nothing can change, the world is what it is, it won't change. I have my own weaknesses, my own sins, my own sufferings. Nothing will change. And our Lord proved that to be wrong. He took on darkness, he took on evil, he took on suffering. He even took on death and proved victorious, and he is risen. He's alive and with us, he walks with us. He offers us that new life, makes us a new creation in and through our baptism of course, but also every day. He just asks that we stay with him.

(04:20):

We say, remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Stay with us, Lord." The Lord's saying, "No, stay with me, my son, and you will know, my son and daughter, and you will know peace. You will know new life. You can become a new creation." The Lord has proved victorious, and how blessed are we that all who follow him share in his victory, both now and forever, because the life he promises is for eternity.

Billy Atwell (04:48):

Absolutely, yeah. There's a funny meme on social media about how exhausted priests are the Monday after Easter because they go through all of these liturgies that sometimes go late into the evening, and there's just so many of them that they participate in, and they also try to concelebrate in other Masses as well. But unfortunately this year, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, because of his health, he had to scale back some of his activities during this time. We know he didn't want that. He loves being with the people, and certainly, Pope Francis likes to reach out and be with the people, especially at a time like this. So what can we learn from his decision to scale back some of his own activities despite what he wanted to do?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (05:25):

Well, I think it's a good example. We have to take care of ourselves, spiritually, of course, is our highest priority, but also physically. And sometimes our bodies let us know what we can do and what we can't do, and because we want the Holy Father here as long as God's going to let him to be here, so we need him at his best. And sometimes, that means to scale back a little, and that, sometimes, is the heaviest cross. It's not so much the suffering, it's that lack of independence. It's that lack of, "I can't do what I want to do," or, "I can't do what I used to do." But what an example that is. What an example, in the midst of suffering, in the midst of our health declining, we still find reasons, every reason to rejoice and to see our lives as an opportunity to give witness to others.

(06:18):

And I think the Holy Father, especially throughout Holy Week and the Triduum, has been a great example to all of us. We had a very powerful moment at our Chrism Mass. We have our dear brother priest and friend, Father Steve Schultz, Chaplain at Paul VI High School, who I know people throughout our diocese have been praying for since months ago. He's suffered a severe stroke, and he made it to the Chrism Mass, he made it to the Chris Mass. He precessed in a wheelchair with another priest wheeling him down the aisle, up the aisle to the thunderous applause of his brother priests and to the faithful, not only because we were happy to see him, which indeed we were, but also for the example he's given us. His life has taken a dramatic turn in a way that he could never have imagined or anticipated. And through it all, he has not given up. He has not been led to despair.

(07:20):

All he kept saying to me at the Chrism Mass when I was speaking with him privately was, "Bishop, I'm so happy to be a priest, so happy to be a priest." And when you think about it, he's offering the greatest priestly sacrifice now, because he's with the Lord on the cross and he still has the great privilege of celebrating Mass every day. "I'm happy to be a priest." What we do, the actions we do every day, the tasks we do, that's not what makes us a priest. We're ordained to offer sacrifice, and that's what Father is doing in a beautiful way, and he is and his family and I am so grateful to everyone at Paul VI High School, but everyone throughout the diocese who continue to keep him in prayers and to be thankful to God for the example he gives us. We all have crosses, we're all suffering, and we can learn from others.

Billy Atwell (08:11):

It was a great Christian witness. It was also a great vocational witness as well, because he and Pope Francis both showed, we might focus on what we can't do, but they said, "What can we do? I can go to the Chrism Mass. I'm not going to be able to walk down the way I would want to. Okay, I'm going to have to be in a wheelchair." Pope Francis didn't do all of the liturgies of Easter week, but he did what he could do. And the priestly fraternity, I mean your outreach to him and that embrace and the brother priests surrounding him, anyone who's discerning a possible call to the priesthood had to look at those and say, "That's the way I want to be as a Christian. Maybe I'm even called to live that way as a priest. Who knows?"

Bishop Michael Burbidge (08:48):

For sure.

Billy Atwell (08:48):

Someone might've seen that and thought that.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (08:49):

For sure, Billy. That's a great reflection you offered.

Billy Atwell (08:54):

During Holy Week, sadly, we had an unfortunate situation here in Fairfax County that also got adopted up at the White House. We learned that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, they approved a proclamation declaring March 31 -- Easter Sunday -- as "Transgender Visibility Day." On Good Friday, The White House announced that President Biden had also made that same proclamation for the country and for the White House there, also stripping a lot of the Christian symbolism out of their Easter celebrations. Apparently, this visibility day dates back to 2009, but no one really knew about it until it was prominently highlighted this year. I'm curious what you think of these proclamations. I could probably guess what you think of it, but if you could share some of your thoughts and how would you-

Bishop Michael Burbidge (09:37):

You were on such a roll with good news, and now we come to this.

Billy Atwell (09:40):

And also how you would want the faithful to respond when they see this kind of thing happening, because it's so offensive, obviously.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (09:45):

Well, it is, and I'm sure like our listeners, I was so extremely disappointed that our local officials and our president would use the most important religious observance on the Christian calendar to proclaim a message that is political, it is, and it's a source of division. So offensive to many people, and it was unnecessary. I know they're going to say, "Well, it goes back to March 31, 2009." We transfer holidays all the time, we transfer. So the fact that they, like you said, we haven't really talked about this day until it was on Easter. So I would tend to think it was calculated, and that is really, really sad.

(10:29):

And it was offensive. As Christians, we're celebrating the most solemn day, the joyful day in our lives, and obviously, this tried to take away from that celebration, but you know ...

Billy Atwell (10:44):

It didn't.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (10:44):

... it didn't. We weren't distracted, and that's why I did not get into a media public debate about it. I wanted our focus to be on Easter and not to lose that attention. That's what I think sometimes our opposition would want, but we would not let that happen.

(11:05):

And we speak the truth. We speak the truth in charity. God create us male and female. That's the truth. And to those who struggle with gender dysphoria, we offer our love, we offer our compassion, our desire to walk with you, to assist you, to counsel you, but we cannot agree that anyone is someone other than who God created that person to be. Nor can we agree with surgeries or other medical inventions to confirm what is not true. I thought also of how hurtful the lifting up of this "Transgender Visibility Day" maybe harms those who have detransitioned.

Billy Atwell (11:48):

Yeah. Their stories are becoming much more known and well-circulated.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (11:52):

They're becoming known to us, too, as a church. People realizing that the destruction and mutilation of the bodies God gave them does not bring about their true identity, it does not bring about the peace, the joy that they so desired, and so those people have to be kept in mind also. So I was extremely disappointed in that. We should celebrate all of life. I wish the President would get that, that we don't need a specific day to celebrate a person in a certain minority, a certain category like that, the "Transgender Visibility Day." That's not everyone. We should be celebrating all of human life.

(12:40):

And I wish the President would join us in special occasions throughout the year where we do exactly that, where we stand up for life, march peacefully for life, celebrate life. But this day just divides people and it hurts people. So finally, if people don't agree with us, we still treat them respectfully. We lead by example. We are consistent in leading by our witness, and that's always with the truth, but always respectfully and compassionately respecting the dignity that belongs to every person as a child of God, the one who created them.

Billy Atwell (13:17):

Right, absolutely. Just a reminder for folks, Bishop Burbidge wrote a great pastoral letter. He had sought out the counsel of many experts in different fields in the drafting of it. It's "A Catechesis on the Human

Person and Gender Ideology." It's a great read. If you're seeing these issues and wishing you were a little more informed on it, a little more catechized, it's a very accessible document. Even I could read it and understand most of it. But if you want to see it, just go to ArlingtonDiocese.org and search for "gender dysphoria." You can also just Google "Bishop Burbidge and gender ideology," and that document comes up very high on the search results there.

(13:51):

You had mentioned President Biden. On Easter Sunday, actually, your brother bishop just to the east of us, Cardinal Wilton Gregory was on CBS "Face the Nation" and said that President Biden, while actively participating in Catholic liturgies and observances, nevertheless like, sadly many others in the faith that follow some of what the church teaches but choose not to follow other things, some of the more challenging teachings maybe for them in the faith, particularly in this case, teachings on life and family, what we believe about the sanctity of human life.

(14:22):

The term Cardinal actually applied to President Biden was "cafeteria Catholic." We all know what that means. It paints the picture. I was curious about what you think about this term, but this phenomena in general. Do you agree with Cardinal Gregory, and what maybe advice or counsel would you have to those who find themselves in that category?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (14:37):

First of all, I've known Cardinal Gregory a long time. We've worked together on many pastoral issues. I appreciate him so much, but he has a big platform right now. He's the Cardinal Archbishop of the nation's capital, and I am glad that he used that platform to speak the truth. And again, he did it as we always do. He did that in charity and in love, he did.

Billy Atwell (15:02):

Absolutely.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (15:02):

But he spoke the truth. And I think the "cafeteria Catholic" phrase gets our attention.

Billy Atwell (15:11):

It makes for good a headline.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (15:11):

Right. But it really goes back to what Jesus said, right? Jesus loves us so much, he does not want us or allow us to be in the middle. He always said--one of the things that the Lord really spoke against was being lukewarm. And he said, "You're either for me or you're against me." And so I think that's what Cardinal Gregory was saying, you can't pick and choose. If you're for the Lord, then you're "all in," and that means following his Gospel and embracing the Gospel of Life. You can't pick and choose. And that's not just for the President.

Billy Atwell (15:53):

That's true.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (15:53):

That's for all of us, all of us, whatever our vocation may be. We can't compromise, we can't be wishy-washy, we can't be lukewarm. We can't practice our faith sometimes or certain times of the year, but not others. The Lord demands a lot, but the reward is beyond anything we can dream.

(16:13):

I thought it was also equally offensive that the White House would not allow religious symbols at that Easter Egg Hunt or whatever they have. How offensive is that?

Billy Atwell (16:24):

Yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (16:25):

Well, then don't celebrate.

Billy Atwell (16:26):

Right, right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (16:27):

You can't make up what Easter is.

Billy Atwell (16:29):

Right, right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (16:30):

Everyone knows what Easter is. It is a celebration of the Lord Jesus who was raised from the dead, who took on the world and proved victorious. That's Easter. You can't pretend it's something else. So we're not going to have religious symbols, but we're going to have Easter eggs, and we're going to have two bunnies, plastic bunnies standing behind the President as if that's Easter.

Billy Atwell (16:52):

It's so trivializing and silly. I wouldn't want my kids to be a part of something like that, just in general. There's no substantive value to it, there's no teaching moment there.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (17:00):

Right. There's no teaching, and you can't redefine, again, what we're saying, consistency. Be consistent. You can't redefine who the human person is. You can't redefine what Easter is. It's not about Easter bunnies and Easter eggs.

Billy Atwell (17:13):

Right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (17:14):

So if you're going to say, "Okay, no religious symbols, we're not going to acknowledge Jesus on Easter Sunday." Well, then don't have a celebration. And the President, I know he says he speaks to priests, and I sure hope that he has a spiritual guide or director who also talks to him about salvation. This is an earthly journey, and we're all heading, God willing, to the same direction, and that's salvation, life with God

forever in heaven. And on the day we die, the Lord's not going to be ... Everything he taught us. He's not going to be asking us about our titles or about our power or our authority or accomplishments. He's going to say, "Did you love me? Did you follow me? Did you take up your cross? Did you live your faith no matter the cost?" And so while I know that anyone in elected office or any of us, we can't impose the creed, everything we believe on other people, we can't impose that, but we should never, ever walk away from who we are and what we believe.

(18:21):

The President, for example, talks about being a Catholic. I think most people of goodwill, most people who are rational would say, "While our present spoke about Easter Sunday and the joy that it brings to him as he celebrates this victory. He went to church, and it was great to see him in church, which I think he does. That's good. But not with Easter bunnies behind him. Why walk away from your faith?" And that goes for all of us, Billy.

Billy Atwell (18:49):

That's true.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (18:50):

We can't be pressured into "not being who I am." And I think the average person and people of goodwill, in the end, respect integrity. And for seeing our president walking away from his faith, especially on Easter, and declaring no Easter symbols, declaring this "Transgender Visibility Day," very, very, very, very disappointing, to say the least.

Billy Atwell (19:16):

Yeah. And the point you made about salvation is astute for all of us, because whether we're gifted or blessed with money or influence or power, part of that conversation with God will be, "What did you do with the gifts that I gave you?" It's like the Parable of the Talent. "I gave you things that could bring about a greater good to serve my people and to give glory. Did you?" And it's such so sad to see people in power miss the opportunity that's in front of them to do tremendous good.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (19:40):

Yeah. And the Lord warns, "The more you have, the more is going to be expected of you, too."

Billy Atwell (19:43):

Absolutely.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (19:44):

And he has a platform as a Catholic president. Again, we respect his role, and we know we can't impose the creed on other citizens, but that doesn't mean you compromise who you are and what you believe.

Billy Atwell (19:58):

Absolutely. Well, I've got a much happier topic to dip into.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (20:03):

Let's end on a good note, Billy. You're getting me all riled up here.

Billy Atwell (20:06):

So this Saturday, just a couple of days from now at St. Teresa in Ashburn, you're going to ordain 12 men to the Transitional Diaconate. This is very exciting, but it's one of the last significant steps on the path to the priesthood, which, God willing, will take place next year for these men. I'm just curious, with such a big group and vocations being such a critical part of our diocese, even a foundation, with the sisters that were brought in by Bishop Welsh and so on, and the prayers that have taken place throughout every parish, what does an ordination class like this mean to you and say about the health of our diocese?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([20:42](#)):

Well, it is a fruit of God's grace, right? A fruit of God's goodness, a fruit of prayers. We, from the very beginning, 50 years ago, began on a solid foundation of a diocese being known for specifically praying for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life. That's how Bishop Welsh, one of the key, key issues he brought to our diocese. We are going to be a diocese that prays specifically for vocations and has continued under all my predecessors, and we continue it now. And I think it's the fruit of it, it's the fruit of prayer. And it is amazing in a diocese our size that we're ordaining 12 transitional deacons, God willing, to be our priests next year. What a gift. And we should be very, very, very thankful for that.

([21:29](#)):

In many ways, they're no different than the 12 apostles in that they're very different, they have different personalities, they have different likes, they have different gifts and talents and limitations, but they're the ones the Lord has chosen. And they have said "yes" and have responded generously. It's not really about the number at all. It's about the quality of men that I will ordain on Saturday. And I assure the faithful, as I always do, that we take very seriously those we admit to the seminary, those we admit to Holy Orders, that they're strong, they're good, they're faithful, they're holy, they're joyful. And I can say that about these 12 men soon to be ordained. I'm very excited about the blessings that will come to our diocese on Saturday.

Billy Atwell ([22:20](#)):

Absolutely, absolutely.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([22:22](#)):

Billy, I have a question for you.

Billy Atwell ([22:23](#)):

All right, all right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([22:25](#)):

This is our what, hundred and ...

Billy Atwell ([22:27](#)):

29th podcast, yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([22:30](#)):

... 129th podcast. Unbelievable. But early last month, you shared some news with me and to your team about a major change for you and your family. So can you update our listeners?

Billy Atwell ([22:41](#)):

Absolutely. I say this with all humility for the opportunities that I've been given, but yeah, so I've accepted a role, so this will be my last podcast, I've accepted a role as the Senior Vice President of Communications for Alliance Defending Freedom. They do a lot of great work kind of on the front lines, defending the issues that we talked about today, religious freedom and life and marriage and family, parental rights and free speech. But I sit here in all humility that you allowed me to participate in this podcast for these 129 episodes and to bring these issues. It is been a gift to serve you and to work with you, and it's been wonderful to know that when major things are happening in our culture, my bishop would talk about them here on the podcast. We could share that throughout the diocese.

(23:23):

But I've worked with you for 10 years, and these have been 10 wonderful years. I do feel called to this next chapter, but I do it with a heavy heart because I care about you deeply, and I'm so grateful for what you've allowed me to help you with here.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (23:35):

Well, thank you so much, Billy, and it has been a joy and a privilege for me to work so closely with you. I have relied and depended upon your guidance and your wisdom, your experience, how you have taken our way of communicating and evangelizing forward in this particular day and age. I am very proud of our communications office. You also have, some you inherited, some you brought on, but you leave us with a very good team.

Billy Atwell (24:07):

They're wonderful.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (24:07):

And we want to honor you by building upon your good work, and we know you want us to go forward taking it, keep moving forward.

Billy Atwell (24:15):

Absolutely.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (24:15):

I know you always say that. We know the Lord always provides. He'll send us the person we need, but we will honor you by building upon your good work, but with deep gratitude for your faithful, for your dedicated service. I wish you and your dear wife and children much, much happiness in this new transition in life. We know that God has a plan for you. And I know from the moment I met you that God has a special plan for you. And if God is leading you to this new direction, you know as I told you, you have my full support and prayers, and I'm so happy that you are moving forward, in a sense bringing to the public arena all that you have done for us and working on issues that are dear to us, marriage and family life, religious liberty, so many issues that are so important. Now, you're doing it in a different way.

(25:14):

Again, God has a special plan for you, and all he asks is that you say "yes," and you have done that. The one who asks gives you the grace and the strength you need, and I pray that those blessings will be yours.

Billy Atwell (25:28):

Thank you so much. I've been honored to be a part of this.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([25:30](#)):

So Billy, thank you. Thank you so much for this ... 129, Billy?

Billy Atwell ([25:35](#)):

I know.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([25:36](#)):

And we didn't get canceled yet?

Billy Atwell ([25:39](#)):

Yeah, it's been a good run, and you'll have many more from here, that's for sure.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([25:43](#)):

Yeah. We'll continue the podcast as we search for your successor, praying to the Holy Spirit, of course, and we'll have some guest hosts doing the podcast. And we know we have your prayers of support, and I appreciate the first thing you told me is that no matter what, you're still a parishioner in the Diocese of Arlington, and you're going to serve the diocese and your bishop faithfully, and I have no doubt about that.

Billy Atwell ([26:04](#)):

However you need me.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([26:05](#)):

All right. Many blessings to you and your family and continued Easter blessings to all of our listeners, that the peace of our Risen Lord will fill your hearts and your home as we renew our promise to walk humbly with our God.

([26:18](#)):

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