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Reflection on Saint Lucia's Carnival

By Archbishop Gabriel Malzaire

Now that Carnival—one of the largest cultural celebrations in our nation and throughout the Caribbean—has concluded, and emotions have had time to settle, it is fitting for us as Christians to engage in an honest and prayerful reflection on the nature and meaning of what we celebrate. The Church frames its concerns around the virtues of moral integrity, modesty, temperance, respect, and personal responsibility—values firmly rooted in Scripture, particularly 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 and Philippians 4:8.

Historically, Carnival emerged as a pre-Lenten observance: a final period of festivity before entering the solemn season of fasting, prayer, and repentance. Today, however, Carnival has largely evolved into a tourism-driven enterprise aimed solely at attracting and entertaining visitors. Beyond the national celebration, individual communities now host their own carnivals throughout the year, extending the season and contributing to what some describe as a continuous party—or *bacchanal*—culture. The Church notes the tension which now exists between Carnival as cultural heritage and Carnival as a commercial product.

The Catholic Church has always affirmed the importance of culture as essential to the integral development of the human person. Culture shapes identity, preserves collective memory, encourages creativity, and strengthens community. Yet authentic culture must also elevate the human spirit and orient humanity toward its ultimate destiny in God.

"All I want, is to know Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:10)

For this reason, culture—like every dimension of human life—must be evangelized. It must be examined in the light of the Gospel and measured against the values of human dignity, mutual respect, personal responsibility, and concern for the common good. Carnival should never be portrayed or experienced as a temporary suspension of moral values. Personal freedom cannot mean freedom from restraint, responsibility, or respect for oneself and others. We must ask ourselves sincerely: *Is this where we are, and is this where we wish to be as a Christian people?*

In recent years, some aspects of our Carnival revelry have raised serious concerns. The increasing skimpiness of some costumes, especially those worn by women, often invites degrading comments from viewing spectators and on social media. Yet our concern must go deeper than clothing. Fundamentally, it is about the dignity people recognize within themselves, the respect they should rightly expect from others, and the moral messages we collectively communicate to our children. We must acknowledge honestly that what is displayed on our streets has become progressively more troubling.

This is not a call to discard Carnival. Indeed, Carnival contains many creative, enriching, and uplifting elements. Its music, artistry, craftsmanship, pageantry, costumes, and communal participation can inspire national pride and strengthen unity. These are gifts worth preserving.

Our principal concern is the character of certain aspects of street revelry and the permissive attitudes that accompany them. These raise serious questions for the Christian conscience and for all who care about the moral wellbeing of our society. If we remain indifferent, we should not be surprised by the moral direction in which our country continues to move.

Human beings need opportunities to celebrate, feast, and experience healthy emotional release. Scripture itself affirms that there is *«a time for every purpose under heaven»* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Yet when every community hosts its own carnival, we risk transforming a seasonal cultural celebration into a year-round

festivity. In doing so, we may unintentionally cultivate an insatiable party culture that leaves too little room for work, reflection, responsibility, and spiritual growth.

This concern must also be understood within the broader decline of courtesy, consideration, integrity and respect in our society. We see it in impatient and reckless driving, the failure to dim headlights for oncoming vehicles, and the growing tendency to behave as though the needs and safety of others do not matter. Such conduct reflects an unhealthy preoccupation with self and a weakening sense of responsibility for one another.

I offer these reflections not in a spirit of condemnation, but out of genuine sorrow and deep concern for the kind of society we are shaping for future generations. My reflections are guided by moral values and the fundamental importance of protecting human dignity. Let us preserve and celebrate all that is beautiful, creative, and culturally enriching in Carnival while courageously confronting whatever undermines human dignity and weakens our moral values. May our celebrations reflect the creativity, discipline, dignity, and mutual respect worthy of our people and the nation we aspire to become.

The important question before us today is this: **Can we hope to see a more dignified, uplifting, and morally grounded Carnival in the years ahead?**