

6 Easter A 2017 SML
JN 14:15-21

This evening's (morning's) gospel finds Our Blessed Lord at the table of the Last Supper, giving His beloved disciples some last minute instructions during His last night on earth. In these instructions, He greased the skids, if you will, with a pep talk to simple, ordinary, uneducated men about founding His Church. Simple, ordinary, uneducated men:

- ✓ one of whom would deny,
- ✓ one of whom was either cynical or a pessimist,
- ✓ two of whom were conceited,
- ✓ all of whom, save one, would flee . . .

all of whom, in one way or another, fell short, but men who, guided by the Holy Spirit, would grow His Church to the ends of the earth. And while Jesus was greasing the skids to found a Church, Judas was greasing the skids to crucify Jesus. So out of the gate, there were problems as the Church was founded.

Along the same lines, the Early Church was not without Her problems either. In fact, one of the primary reasons why St. Paul wrote his many epistles, which comprise the majority of the New Testament's writings, was to confront and correct problems in the Early Church:

- ✓ racial tensions
- ✓ persecutions
- ✓ tension between church and state
- ✓ religious freedom
- ✓ religious practices
- ✓ sexual immorality in the church
- ✓ law suits
- ✓ perverting the Gospel
- ✓ divisions
- ✓ liars
- ✓ Church functions reduced to merely social affairs

Stated simply, twenty-first century problems in the first century church; or first century problems in a twenty-first century church. It's not an either or, it's a both and!

These apostles were good, and perhaps they could have been better. In fact there were so called "super apostles" as cited twice in 2 Corinthians who were more eloquent and more influential than the Twelve, but all of whom were advancing their own agendas, rather than advancing the agenda of Our Blessed Lord.

Our Blessed Lord wanted then, and wants now, a Church that is holy. Our Holy Father Francis has this to say about “Holy” Mother Church:

The church is holy: it is present to the world “as a sign – simultaneously obscure and luminous – of a new presence of Jesus, of his departure and of his permanent presence. (Both His departure and His presence He discusses in today’s gospel.) She prolongs and continues him.” The Church’s holiness is manifest in “the intimate life of this community – the life of:

- ✓ listening to the Word
- ✓ and the apostles’ teaching,
- ✓ of charity lived in a fraternal way,
- ✓ and of sharing bread.”

Yet Pope Francis is pragmatic enough to realize there are problems in the Church that are the direct result of sin. Pope Francis continues:

We need to meditate on what is the fundamental contradiction of our lives: the opposition between God’s desire to integrate us firmly into His Church and the sinfulness that destroys our relationship to the Lord and to our holy Mother the hierarchical Church. Conscious of our

humble state, let us enter into this meditation by realizing we are “the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols . . . Our humility is born of our consciousness of how seriously and how frequently we have sinned against the Gospel . . . Our (personal) sins are not ours alone; rather, they affect the whole Church. By our sin we obscure her holiness; we make the Church less fruitful and less disciplined. Let us ask for the grace to experience the emptiness of all idols, especially those found within the frequent situations of dechristianization of our day. These situations, in which we ourselves, take part, attack our faith, which is nearly always exposed today to secularism, even to militant atheism. It is a faith exposed to trials and threats, and even more, a faith besieged and actively opposed . . .ⁱ

Particular to papal pronouncements powerfully packed with prose, what is the Pope’s point?

The Pope’s point is – if you’re to the point of asking the hopeless question, “If there were problems with the Apostles, and we’re facing the same Church problems today in the 21st century that were faced in the first century, so what’s the use? Francis says take a look at salvation history for some answers:

- ✓ The hopelessness of the Israelites who while wandering in the desert said “No” to the hopefulness of the living God and preferred to adore an impotent idol (EX 32:7-10)
- ✓ The hopelessness of the liberated slaves who said “No” to God’s hope filled plan of salvation and preferred to dream about the onions and garlic of their days in slavery (NUM 11:5-6)
- ✓ The hopelessness of those wandering in the desert who said “No” to divinely inspired leadership and took refuge in grumbling (EX 16:6-8)
- ✓ The hopelessness of the Thessalonians who wanted everything all at once and turned into gossiping busybodies. (2THES 3:11)

Francis’ point is, once you give in and ask, “What’s the use?”, your only other option is hopelessness. And if that’s my only option, then I for one, would just as soon “keep on keeping on!”

ⁱ Open Mind, Faithful Heart by Pope Francis; pp.78-79.