

Proclaiming a message we believe



One of the great internal conflicts of the church had to do with two of the saints in our stained glass windows...Dominic and Francis; or rather their communities, the Dominicans and Franciscans. Several years ago at our annual Diocesan Conference we heard a great talk on this, by a Franciscan. The conflict goes something like this: why did Jesus come? Or why was the Son of God born as human? The Dominicans idea on this can best be summed up in a phrase from that great hymn written by St. Thomas Aquinas that we sing at the Easter Vigil, the Exultet. The phrase, “felix culpa” or “o happy fault: This means that Jesus came to remedy the sin of Adam and Eve. Sounds reasonable right.

Francis though was not into this belief. He, or at least his community thought that it appears that sin has the power to command God or change God’s plan. Francis’ belief...the Son of God was always going to be human, it was all part of God’s plan. Human sinfulness had nothing to do with it, rather it is all based on God’s love. Sounds reasonable too. Yet these communities fought over this for many many many years; leading one pope to declare a “pox on both of your houses”. They were conflicted because it meant something deep to them and their understanding of God and faith.

What do we believe?

This is not a rhetorical question. We all will need to know what we believe; to make the Good News ours; to live it so as to share it. We need to be more than Christian in name or by “Tradition” or culture.

We also believe, not just for our sake or our own individual needs, but for the good of all and for the glory of God; of as the Jesuits will say, for the Greater Glory of God (Ad majorem Dei Gloriam--and that’s three religious communities mentioned for those counting.)

Jesus sends out his disciples with clear instructions. They are to only take essentials; nothing that would give the appearance they are trying to earn

money or beg money from this. In fact, their only support would be based on the effectiveness of their message and the openness of the people. Their effectiveness would be how much they believed in the message.

And how they would give their message would mirror Jesus'; and it would not have been hellfire and condemnation. Rather repent, meaning change your thinking, for the Kingdom of God is at hand. And they demonstrated how God's kingdom was at hand, they healed and they exorcized the demons. So they helped people.

This would not have been an academic, theological enterprise. It would have come from their own appreciation of what Jesus had taught them; the authority that Jesus gave to them.

We too are sent out to be disciples. Our message though will be somewhat different than that original message the disciples would have had in the gospel we heard; because our message includes that Jesus Christ died and has risen from the dead. Our message needs to be akin to that beautiful summation of St. Paul in the letter to the Ephesians; a positive message of God's great plan, God's great desire for our unity, for our oneness! A oneness not based on our merits, but because God is Good, and God is Good all the time.

What does this belief mean for us, or what can it mean for us?

In Jesus Christ, through his life, death and resurrection, we know that God loves us.

Jesus has shown our redemption, our value, our worth, by his willingness to die for us.

Jesus has shown our adoption as children of God through the resurrection and sharing of the Holy Spirit.

It means God is with us. It means God is not out to get us and punish us, but God is out to get us and embrace us.

God created us for love, to be loved.

God created us to live and for fullness of life.

This is the core message for us as Christians. This is the message we are meant to be living out, to have in our hearts; to share with all the world.

Yet, what do we fight about these days as Christians; language use, receiving communion in hands or tongue, who is valid? Which way is the priest pointed during mass? Wanting to make families sit in the quiet room Now some matters have some importance, not all; but none of them get to the heart of our faith in Jesus Christ, none of these are evangelization tools. These are not important to helping people understand they are loved by God.

If we allow the love of God that Jesus gives to us to be at work, then the effect of our lives is to help others, to share compassion; to be healers for those who are hurting; to be brothers and sisters for each other. The effect will be for others to want to be part of Jesus Christ as well; to make this message of Jesus' their own.

A person struggling with serious illness; a parent worried for a child; a man wanting to get out of addiction needs to know that God is for them, with them, helping them to not be controlled by the darkness.

A woman making a hard choice, a family trying to make ends meet; they want options for life that come from a community willing to share of their own blessings.

We are Christians. We follow and believe in Jesus Christ. We believe in the Kingdom of Heaven/God here on earth.

We are, we follow and we believe not just for ourselves, but for the whole world; and if for the whole world, then too for the Glory of God.