

THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

Three Views on Mission

By Fr. Michael Penfield

Today, I would like to continue our look at three historical images of evangelism. I do this in the hope that we may see something we can employ to further our own evangelical mission. Remember, I am framing these three images of evangelism as archetypes. But, ultimately, we must ask the Holy Spirit to lead us, to give us a heart to feel and to give us ears to hear. From Him and through Him only will we be successful in reaching a doubting, troubled world. And God alone should be our ultimate inspiration, courage, and strength.

The first person we looked at was Saint Benedict and his Benedictine Order. The second person we will look at today is Saint Francis of Assisi. Like Saint Benedict, Saint Francis formed a religious order, but the way he evangelized was different. And what his mission became was also different.

The first thing that we need to note with Saint Francis is that he was NOT clergy initially. What many people do not know is that Saint Francis was never a priest. He was a layperson who formed an influential order. Eventually and reluctantly he became a deacon only so that he could read the Gospel to those who were in his order with him.

This fact is important for us Americans to remember. We tend to “professionalize” everything. Thus, many of our parishioners may feel that the work of evangelism is the “priest’s job” or the “clergy’s job”. This excuse seems quite popular, especially in the state where I was rector of a church. But what is clear when we look at Saint Francis is that this excuse is flat. It has no legs. Anyone can evangelize AND everyone should!

The second thing that we have to acknowledge is that Saint Francis was not the easiest person to live with or be around. He was very strict about his vow of poverty and his order. And he insisted that those who joined the Order of Friars Minor keep the same strict life discipline as he did. But, this did earn him a great deal of respect. Because of his

strict discipline, when he spoke, the Church listened to him.

I was speaking to a friend of mine who had an interesting observation. We were speaking of the Reformation and how the church splintered in the 1500s. He said that, prior to Martin Luther, when someone in the church saw corruption and the need for reform, the Church listened. But in the 1500s, the Church did not listen to Martin Luther and other reformers in the church. Those in authority refused to listen, and as a result, the church split. To its credit, in the 1200s, they listened to Saint Francis, and his reforms helped save the church.

But this is also an important aspect of being part of a church. Churches are run by people, and people are flawed. We are a fallen race; and those in church are just as flawed, just as fallen as everyone else. The only difference is our sins are covered by the Blood of Christ. That does NOT mean we do not sin; rather it “just” means that our sins have been forgiven and not by anything we have done. We need to be constantly and immensely impressed by God’s great gift of grace through His only Son’s sacrifice upon the Cross. And we must constantly be vigilant – vigilant as to our own hypocrisy and to the errors of the Church. We may not get the same command as Saint Francis did to “rebuild My Church,” but we are to be a voice against that which is creeping into church that is harmful. We must speak out, but we must also speak out in love.

And may I add one more thing: we must be careful. Like I said, we are flawed humans. We may be wrong. We may see a problem that is not a real problem. It may be a personal taste or prejudice. Before we speak, we must pray. After praying and being sure we should speak, we must. Then, we let it be. It is not part of our modern culture to be patient, but patience is important when something like chastisement is spoken.

We have to see if the words spoken have some effect – whether God lets those words have some effect.

Our Core Value is:

“The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us.”



The Vision of the Convocation is:

*“To STRENGTHEN existing churches;
To PLANT new churches; and
To RAISE UP missional leaders.”*

We must also listen, for in listening we may be able to hear our own errors and correct them. Either way, listening, speaking, love and the Holy Spirit must be involved if errors in the Church are to be corrected.

Third, unlike the Benedictines, the Franciscans, as they were beginning to be called, turned outward. They went out into the community initially, feeding and clothing the poor, giving away all that they had and constantly living for the sake of others. It was quite demanding and did not lend itself to being an established Order in the Church. However, once it was recognized as an Order and once Saint Francis left Italy to try to convert the Muslim Sultan and stop the Crusades, the Order of Friars Minor started to develop property, friaries, and become an established order. Radical poverty had created the order and brought many to the faith, but it did not lend itself to the administration of a religious order with many friars throughout Europe.

The Franciscan Order, just like the Benedictine Order, has lessons for us to learn. From Saint Francis we learn that all can be evangelists, and that all should be evangelists. We also see that we have a duty to be a check on the Church while being a check on ourselves. And finally, we can see that turning outward and working hard to be good Christians is a great way of evangelizing. But we can also see the traps.

Churches have been destroyed over trivial disputes. Split upon split upon split has been the history of Protestantism

since the Reformation. The Amish split from the Mennonites over wearing buttons (the Amish still use hook and eye). And the history of American Anglicanism since the 1960s bears out the truth of this statement. It is extremely important to be able to distinguish between the important and the trivial, and it is important to invoke the Holy Spirit in any such dispute. Prayer and patience; understanding and humility; and finally self-

understanding – are we really bringing up a significant problem or is it about something I just don't like. In other words, ultimately, we need to listen – listen to what the Church authorities are saying, listen to what others are saying AND listen to what we are saying. Only through all of this can we help reform a church that needs reformation. Without it, the Body of Christ is torn asunder again and again and again.

However, for anyone who wants to follow the Franciscan Order, it is a wonderful means to gain an understanding of sacrifice, of humility, of trusting God to provide, and the Christian, Godly love we can experience helping those in need. But, living a life of radical Christianity is not easy. Yet, nothing can be as powerful in reaching others for Christ, even in our rather jaded,

modern society.

There is one more archetype of evangelism I would like us to look at next month. We shall next examine the Anglo-Catholics who evangelized in Great Britain during the 19th Century as an archetypal model for modern times.

God bless.



Philip Fruytiers, St. Francis of Assisi, oil on canvas
Public Domain

This Little Light of Mine

By Bishop Winfield Mott

"We were looking for a giant and found a man who made all our lives bigger

We were looking for some superpowers and found clarity of thought, kindness and persistence

We were looking for a revolution and found it in parish halls with tea and biscuits and late-night meetings under fluorescence

We were looking for a negotiator and found one who understood that no one wins unless everyone wins and that peace is the only victory

We were looking for joy and heard it in the song of a man who loved his town and his missus even more

We were looking for a great leader and found a great servant."

So eulogized Bono about the recently deceased John Hume (that's the Bono from the Irish band U2, not the Sonny and Cher one). It beautifully records Hume's contributions over many decades of the "Troubles" in northern Ireland, where he was the persistent advocate of non-violence and architect of what eventually became the Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace and shared government. Hume richly deserves the praise.

But it occurs to me that Bono has also described the attributes of an ideal Christian leader. Each of us should aspire to these qualities. John Hume was a sacrificing servant whose Christian faith guided him as he, in the face of great adversity

and danger, persistently helped others achieve a wider vision for themselves of what their society should look like and how living together in peace is the best way to live.

The United States currently faces multiple crises, some external and some self-inflicted, but all polarizing and tearing people apart. It appears to resemble the years just before the Civil War. It certainly resembles the years of the Troubles in northern Ireland. Acrimony, division, violence, ethnic hostility, political hostility, anger towards government, disgust towards those causing chaos and disturbance, intolerance in all directions, fears for safety, economic anxieties, “there is no health in us,” as the Prayerbook puts it.

And no American version of John Hume has appeared, or if he has, he is unable to get our attention. We are effectively leaderless and rudderless, despite the strident voices from all sides urging us toward further discord and discontent. “Clarity of thought, kindness and persistence” is noticeably absent from our present public forum.

In the crisis which triggered the Civil Rights movement half a century ago, Christian leadership emerged. Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference steered with Christian principles of non-violence, the oneness of God’s family and the equality of everyone’s vocation. Its goal was to transcend racism and pigment. As King put it, his dream was that his children would “be judged, not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Opposition came not only from those who supported the racist status quo, but also from the movement around Malcolm X, which did not want to transcend race but promoted equality of opportunity, together with an essentially self-segregating African-American community.

The current Black Lives Matter movement mostly follows Malcolm X. Christian leadership is conspicuously missing. Nor is it a Marxist movement, as many contend. BLM leaders may see themselves as Marxists-I don’t know them- but Marxism is grounded on the solidarity of the proletariat across racial barriers. American Communists transcended race long before the rest of the country caught up. The BLM movement is much more built on anarchist principles. It makes for a movement which can destroy and accuse with righteous fervor but which does not overcome and

offers no real solutions, only anger. That kind of confrontation eventually causes backlash and attempts to justify bad behavior. This is exactly what happened in northern Ireland.

In addressing the current negative hysteria, what would Christian leadership look like if it could emerge?

1. It would begin with loving our neighbors, all of them, and not stop loving them if they do not love us back.

2. It would mean rejecting violence and disdain as a path forward. Step one of loving your neighbor is not to harm him or her

3. It would proclaim, with Martin Luther King, that there is only one race, the human race. We are all equally God’s children. Each of us is not only different, but unique. That is cause for celebrating, not discriminating. Racial and ethnic stereotypes and prejudices are, in a word, unchristian. Whatever your pigment, if you have such views, you are wrong and need to change. With God’s help, you can change and see your neighbors as God sees, and loves, them. Christians refuse to accept racial divides and understand that there are no races other than the human one.

4. It would follow St. Paul, who comments that your body is

a temple of God. It is part of your stewardship to care for it, and also to care for your neighbor’s health and well-being. This means doing whatever is the best health practice, as medically and spiritually identified, always but especially in a pandemic, since the latter can only be solved by community cooperation. Health is a stewardship issue, not a political football.

5. It would remind those who seek to divide us, urging us to despise and fear other groups, that “no one wins unless everyone wins.”

Equally, what would a great Christian leader be like?

1. As Bono said, he or she would be a great servant, working to bring healing and unity. Just as Jesus identifies himself as our servant, so Christians lead by being the servants of the people.

2. The Christian leader would relentlessly seek peace, advocate only non-violent means, and always act from the motivation of love.

3. The Christian leader works with people to build them up, to reach their potential to love and serve, rather than attacking



or tearing down others, whether individuals or groups.

4. The Christian leader both seeks and offers forgiveness and rejects revenge and retribution.

5. The Christian leader seeks to live, teach and relate as Jesus did.

6. The Christian leader understands that change happens best in the mundane settings of ordinary life, “in parish halls with tea and biscuits and late-night meetings.”

There are those who think the attribute of a Christian leader is none of the above. Rather, “they ought to stick to religion.” But Christians have always been prophets in the public forum because that is what Jesus mandated. To ignore the needs of others does not stand the scrutiny of Matthew 25, James 1:27 or the parable of the Good Samaritan. We are called to love our neighbor and his problems. Nor can we implement our mandated stewardship of the earth by abdicating any responsibility for it. As Christians, we know this is God’s earth and we humans are appointed by him to care for it and its creatures, human and otherwise. As people who have received saving grace through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we understand the

context of God’s world is sacrificial love. Having this wisdom, Jesus has mandated us to both proclaim it “unto the very end of the age” (Matthew 27:18-20) and to model it for others.

We are used to others fixing things while we watch. “They” need to do something, we say. But in crisis, leadership often emerges from the ranks of ordinary people, not from the elite. In this pandemic, for instance, health care workers have become heroes selflessly stepping up to care for others while “leaders” flounder and try to promote their own interests. It is not hard to ascertain which people are following Christian ideals.

Solutions will likely come from those parish halls and places like them, a thousand local voices coming together, community after community, to get us out of these multiple crises. It may take you. Perhaps your parish hall is the place to invite some neighbors to gather, to discuss honestly and without rancor, how a neighborhood, a town can share the love of God together. You can challenge the voices of hate, discord and division and encourage those who are willing to reach out and heal together. That is not only what Jesus did, it is what Christians have done in every crisis since. Now it is our turn, each of us.

A Message During COVID

By Vicar-General Fr. Michael Penfield

At today’s Sunday Service (9 August), the Gospel lesson read was Jesus walking on water to His disciples as they were being tossed about by waves and wind. His disciples thought He was a ghost. Jesus said to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid”, I have been told, is said by Jesus 365 times in the Bible – which works out to be once for every day of the year. I do not know if this count is accurate; I have never sat down to verify the number of times He said “Do not be afraid”. But quite honestly I do not care. What IS important is the idea that every day we should remind ourselves NOT to be afraid.

In Psalm 46, verse 10, the Lord tells us, “Be still and know that I am God.” I have reminded myself often during this pandemic of this verse. I see things happening in our society and in our churches, things that seem strange and irrational and ponder what is going on, and then I remind myself of this verse.

I do not know if this pandemic has brought to the surface troubles that existed in some of our parishes before, but were well buried, or if it has given us all time to think, and maybe overthink past hurts, but I have the sad duty to report two changes in our convocation. The first is that Christ the King in Grover Beach, California has decided to split into two congregations. One shall continue as a house church currently and will remain in the Convocation. Fr. Chris Linebarger has stepped down as rector and Fr. David Bartholomew has stepped

up as interim rector of this house church. The other congregation is continuing as Christ the King and is entering a period of discernment to decide where they are to go and what their church should become. They have not decided whether they will remain within the Convocation of the West or not. Pray for all of them for discernment, wisdom, and healing.

The second church is Saint Andrew’s in Phoenix, Arizona. It has chosen to stop as a church in MDAS, though the name will continue with its original rector who is an REC priest with a campus ministry in Phoenix. But the church will not be meeting where it currently meets. Fr. Koos van Leeuwen has decided to step down as rector, and Fr. Mark Shields has decided to retire at this time. Pray for them as well. After some rest, let us pray that both will find a new calling and a new mission.

But today’s lesson comes echoing back strongly. It is important for all of us to hear: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” We are to dismiss our fears. We know Jesus. He is our rock. He is our strength. And He knows what is happening and why. And, if we are still, we may realize that God’s voice is not in earthquake, the wind, the fire, or even in the pandemic. God’s voice is the still, small voice that is on the gentle breeze and that we only hear in our stillness. And, knowing this gives me great comfort and courage. God bless.