

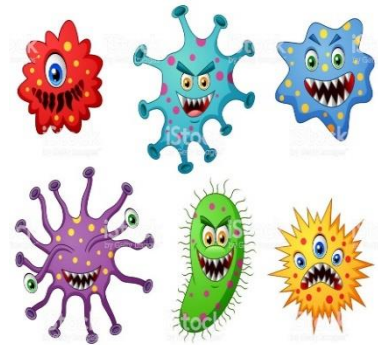


The Corona Chronicles

Reviewing the Church through a time of crisis

21.07.2020

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It's time to return Christ to the centre

I grew up in a world that was still recognisably Christian. People attended church in large numbers, had their children baptized, were married in church and had Christian funerals. The local parish was the home of youth groups, scouts, sporting clubs, scouts and all kinds of organisations for people of every age. They were busy places.

Why have our parishes shrunk so much? Back "then" we had so much going on, with every age group fully engaged and involved and pews packed on Sundays. What changed? Do we strive to recover the past or is the Spirit saying something else to us in the decline?

Then it all seemed to have changed. Secularism had replaced faith in God and in the process of replacement, Western society had become deeply anti-Christian. The truths of the Gospel were rejected, and along with that came the rejection of any kind of moral theology.

To be an active Christian in this new world meant taking on a way of living that was going to be profoundly countercultural. Christians were on the nose and Church leaders had lost their positions of respect and influence. In a world where God was thought to be dead, Nihilism ruled all public discourse and decision making and all things and beliefs became relative. Not only was God dead, there seemed to be no great feeling of loss in the divine absence. What then was the point of Church?

Can we acknowledge the action of the Spirit today?

When we ponder the future of the Church and what must be done if we are to renew Her for mission in the world of today and tomorrow, we begin by humbly and gratefully acknowledging how we are not beginning from scratch. We have in our midst the ...

Risen Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's Revelation, a priceless treasure, the "precious pearl" the Word of God made flesh, Way, Truth and Life of men and women, to whom he opens a destiny of utter justice and

happiness. He is the sole Liberator and Saviour, who with his death and resurrection broke the oppressive chains of sin and death, and who reveals the merciful Love of the Father, and the vocation, dignity, and destiny of the human person

(Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean).

The task before then us is not simply the reshaping and reviving of our local parish or Diocese. Our call is to the ministry of (a) guarding and (b) nourishing the faith of the people of God. We must remind each other of our roles in the saving works of God in creation: by virtue of our baptism, we are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ. If we are not active collaborators in these saving works, we are not Christ's disciples. This is the goal towards which we are moving under God's Holy Spirit – sharing with Christ the works of the Father.

What the Spirit is calling us to do is the confirming, renewing, and revitalizing the newness of the Gospel.

After decades of decline on account of our spiritual deafness to the Spirit, we should now be finding ourselves on the eve of the opening up of a new period in history – the era of spiritual revival. If nothing else, the Covid pandemic has served to remind us of the empty promises of science, economics, politics, military power and the evils of individualism and nihilism. We should be reminding the world of the failures of these godless ways, while we remind ourselves of our guilt for allowing God's sheep to wander from the flock and into the "wilderness".

What God is doing he is doing through believers

There is a pervasive discontent around our country and world. It is being fermented by new social and political turbulence but more significantly for us, by the expansion of a culture that is distant from and hostile to our Christian tradition.

For this reason, every level of Church is being called by the Spirit to a deep and profound rethinking of its mission, so that we engage the world with fidelity and boldness in these new circumstances. As these new social and political philosophies prove to be empty in times of crisis and uncertainty, we need to be seen to be people living in the Light and with Hope.

Believers no longer have an option of "Church life as normal"

The term ***nihilism*** was used by Friedrich Nietzsche to describe the disintegration of traditional morality in Western society. In the 20th century, nihilism encompassed a variety of philosophical and aesthetic stances that, in one sense or another, denied the existence of genuine moral truths or values, rejected the possibility of knowledge or communication, and asserted the ultimate meaninglessness or purposelessness of life or of the universe.

We do not have the luxury of retreating back to the imagined glorious days of the past. Nor are we able to choose to do nothing when we find ourselves facing off with those in the Church who oppose changes and any rethinking of the ways of Christ today.

In Gospel love we need to challenge those who see only confusion, dangers, and threats in any talk of renewal and reform. We are called upon to reject those who seek to disguise the complexity of situations with tired old ideological slogans, or irresponsible attacks on those whose perceptions differ.

What the Spirit is calling us to do is the confirming, renewing, and revitalizing of the newness of the Gospel, the Truth of the Gospel that is deeply rooted in our history and is brought alive through personal and community encounters with Jesus Christ. It is not a new call as it is the expectation of the Gospel that we bring the Good News of God's saving love to those who live in darkness and fear.

The great feature of this rethinking on renewal is the way it depends not so much on

“incarnating” the Gospel means bringing the Gospel message alive for the people among whom we live and work and play. It means making it possible for people to have a personal encounter with the living Christ in our words and in our deeds.

programmes and structures, but rather on new men and new women being formed in grace; on believers incarnating the traditions and newness of the Gospel. As missionaries of God's Kingdom, they proclaim a whole new life for Australians that is open to being rediscovered only in and through the light and power of the Spirit.

For too long many Christians have carried their faith as little more than baggage, one aspect of our

lives among many such competing claims to our time, self, and resources. Faith for far too many was changed into religion, a collection of rules, prohibitions, and selected truths; we accepted occasional participation in the sacramental and parish life of the community, a personal interpretation of the moral life and a sceptical approach to the Scriptures.

This kind of Christian adherence had surviving the trials of our time (from The odd thing was that while many by the wayside, many more lost their day to day life of the parish continued normal. Maintaining what we had

Jesus Christ reveals himself as newness of life and a revival of mission in all dimensions of our personal and social existence.

no chance of the 1960's onward). believers were falling faith completely, the as though all was took priority.

The mission field of the world has changed enormously

It is for this reason we must begin everything we do by going back to Christ. It is because being Christian, living the Gospel is not the result of a personal choice or a pursuit of lofty ideas. Faith comes from an encounter with an event, a person, with Jesus who is the Son of God; the Christ sent by the Father for our liberation. A personal response to the Living Lord is the source and foundation of a genuine faith. It is this Christ of God who gives human life a new horizon and a decisive direction. What God wants is nothing less than a transformation of the whole of creation.

What is clear in the Spirit is how the Gospel continues to call us to make choices just as God had called the people of Israel to make their own choices in the Wilderness... *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction (Deuteronomy 30:15)*. It is stark language but the Scriptures demand nothing less of us today. In the Spirit we too must choose between paths that lead to life and paths that lead to death.

If all is well in the world, why have loneliness, violence, decline in family life, depression, and fear for the future become such major factors in the decline of human wellbeing? What hope can the Gospel bring to societies that struggle in these ways? What should I/we be doing?

Paths of death are those that lead to squandering the traditions and heritages we received from God through those who preceded us in the faith. They are paths that mark a culture without God; cultures who have replaced the God who has revealed Himself to us with idols made by human hands.

The paths of death are driven by the gods of power, wealth, and momentary pleasure; gods of status, individualism and hedonism; gods who preach the primacy of the individual over the good of the community. These all serve to under-mine the sanctity and dignity of human beings and what is good for every human community.

Paths of true and fullness of life for all peoples are those paths shaped by an engagement with the new life Christ has brought us from His Father. Jesus declared himself to be the only **Way, Truth and Life** for the world. This is the divine life God shares with us because He loves us. It is a life-giving love. Why would God do this for us? It is because the divine plan is that we might live in a world in which faith, hope and love renew the life of persons and transform the cultures of peoples.

Conclusion:

Much as the “world” will dislike this message, we must commit ourselves to a Truth that is true, not just for ourselves but is true for every man and woman on the earth. This is the Truth revealed to us by the Son of God who is Himself The Truth of God.