



THE NEW SHOFAR

Is Christ our Treasure or just a good idea?

What would we “sell” to be truly one with Christ?

July 26th

The Torah of your mouth is more precious than gold

Our psalm today places the Scriptures, the Bible, Revelation, the Word of God within its proper place within the life of every true disciple of Christ. If what God Himself has revealed to us of the divine will is not *more precious than thousands of pieces of gold and silver*, then we will never know God and never succeed in serving Him. Further, **St Jerome** (342-420 A.D.) warned *Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and if the man who does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of God, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ...* To not know Scripture is to not know Christ!

It is for this reason, biblical renewal must form a part of any Church and parish reform and renewal. It is in the Bible the Holy Spirit reveals to us how we can become dynamic Christians, men and women who build on the authentic heritages of our ecclesial past. In the Bible we are led from the fruitless task of institutional maintenance into the way of an enriching and empowering Gospel living in the mission fields of this new millennium.

Only through building our faith communities on the twin pillars of Word and Sacrament will we ever be able to respond to the command of Jesus to *go therefore and make disciples of all nations*... Learning the catechism is important and it has been a core means of maintaining the Church through many lean and dry periods but it can never meet the demands of the modern world. Equally true is the uselessness of “liberalism”, what John Henry Newman called *religion as mere sentiment*.

Faith is not picked up through osmosis

Many of us were born into and grew up in Christian cultures where most people were engaged in church activities and attended church on Sundays. We had groups and clubs for all ages and for both men and women. There were social events, parades, youth groups and dances, all going under the heading of “Church events”. We did not have to think all that much and easily slipped into the existing model. Faith was transmitted as if by osmosis. But it seemed to work as our Sunday worship events were full and we were content.

But it did not last long once our world found itself caught up in the turbulent 1960’s. All of those Christian facades crumbled and fell. The Gospel was now but one value system fighting against a myriad of world views and value systems. Religious certainties were no longer certain, and the Truth of the Kingdom of God said to be one possible truth in a world that prized pluralism. Osmotic faith was never going to be enough.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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Teaching a black and white Christianity did not stop the decline in the Church and progressives within the Church who sought to blend the Gospel teachings with the philosophies of the world proved to be even more powerless in bringing about renewal. History shows how watering down biblical teachings, combined with inflexible repeating of the traditional catechism has left much of the Western world as a spiritual wasteland.

To whom shall we go? You have the words of life eternal.

Today's Gospel reading reminds us of the way Jesus understood the importance of what He was bringing to the world from God His Father. It was a *pearl of great price, a treasure hidden in a field*. It is the kind of treasure so fundamental to our becoming true and full human beings in this world, that we would willingly *go sell all we have* that the treasure might be ours. That is all we have, and not just parting with a few trinkets.

According to Origen (184-253), *whoever is near to Christ is near to the fire*. Jesus himself had a similar saying...*I came to cast fire upon the earth* (Luke 12:49) and so it is no surprise to see Pentecost coming upon the Church in the form of tongues of fire. The Apostles then were touched by fire and in Acts Luke understood this fire to be purifying, inspiring and a power binding men and women together into a new humanity. Into the Church. This Pentecost community is the Body of Christ on earth and through each and every disciple of Christ, the Spirit continues to cast *fire upon the earth*. And didn't it burn brightly!

In the Fire of the Spirit, I am no longer I but am a Temple of the Living God

The much-maligned Joseph Ratzinger wrote a beautiful meditation on Pentecost in which he speaks of the transforming power of the *fire* of the Spirit. It melts us so that the old 'me' is purified and a new, animated *I-in-Christ* is brought alive as an *icon of the Spirit* in the world. By that he means we have come so close to the divine fire that we become the means by which others – unbelievers – can see and experience Immanuel...God truly with us.

A Christianity of fire is one that is profoundly countercultural. It is one that strives to convert the world and the accepted culture by proclaiming the Truth of God's Kingdom, through worshipping in Spirit and in Truth and by seeking to model a more humane way of living. A Church enlivened by the great treasure that is the Fire of Pentecost does not seek to get along with the world. It strives to convert the world to Christ.

This is what Paul understood to be the Way of Christ in his letter to the Romans. We are *called according to His purpose* and not according to what we might prefer, and not to make the world happy. It is only when we truly love and faithfully serve God, that we discover how *all things* really do *work for the good*.

There is our post-Covid course for living the Way of the Kingdom. It all begins with Jesus Christ and Him as the kind of treasure worth *selling all we have* in order to be at one with Him. Jesus was sent by the Father to reveal the Divine will and the Divine plan for creation. Running around like headless chooks trying to discern the will of God for us is going to do little more than make us sound admirably busy. Christ encountered in the Bible, in the Sacraments and in the community of believers is the only enduring Way to a renewed world.

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