

Catholic Empowerment for New Realities: Charisms Meeting New Needs

Introduction

Pentecost is traditionally understood as that event during which the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, gifted them with the ability to be understood in multiple languages, and compelled them to proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to all nations. For the first thousand years one might describe excitement about the message as the initiative for seeking converts. With the departures of those identified as Orthodox and Protestant, the excitement devolved into a defensive posture which was exacerbated in the religious pluralism and multicultural reality in the United States.

Toward the middle of the 20th Century, the Second Vatican Council was convened with a firm belief that an update of language and approach was necessary to more effectively proclaim this Good News. Among the traditional and practicing Catholics, disappointment was one of the significant by-products of the Second Vatican Council. The papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI saw policies of retrenchment to pre-Vatican II standards and the appointment of traditional bishops and cardinals opposed to renewal. This led to major failures including the role/power of women; an updating of the understanding of human sexuality, marriage, and birth control; and the relaxation of mandated clerical celibacy.

Another reality with significant impact on practicing Catholics is the sexual abuse scandal that involved thousands of priests as pedophiles with victims numbering in the tens of thousands.

Catholics were scandalized and further distressed when learning of the failure of Catholic hierarchy to deal effectively with this issue from the time it was first identified. Thus began another major wave of departures.

Recognizing the departure of so many Catholics, walking away from the excitement of Pentecost, our new evangelization call might be defined as reawaken the fundamental values of our Catholic beliefs and community.

To do this, however, it seems necessary to look more carefully at the issues that triggered the departure of so many Catholics (commonalities among those who have drifted away). It would also be helpful to identify a number of different and more contemporary approaches which might entice them to take another look at the Catholic church.

Current Realities

We live an incredibly new reality. Among contributors are certainly the COVID 19 Pandemic, the reach of the Internet, the impact social media has in communication, and the political divide that has been exacerbated in the last four years.

While the pandemic has caused severe loss of life throughout the world, it has had other impacts as well. Because of the need for isolation, the economies of the world's most advanced societies have been negatively impacted. People who were accustomed to volunteering at food banks now find them-



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selves in those lines asking for assistance. While social distancing and wearing of masks contribute to the containing of the virus, a significant portion of government leaders and their followers profess that these actions inhibit their freedom and elect not to observe them. We experience the significant loss of a previous value known as the common good.

The Internet now provides platforms for all sorts of positive and negative opinions, often put forward in the form of absolute truths to be accepted at face value. Foreign governments have accessed these vehicles in the United States as ways to interfere with both our government and way of life.



Finally, the political divide in the United States has been even more starkly presented and we have found isolationism, racism, and the constant flow of untruths to be overwhelming to the point where we are tempted to just shut down and close the world out of our lives, an approach that has inflicted incredible damage to our belief in community and collaboration.

These realities are a crisis for society at large and the Catholic church in particular. But, properly viewed, this crisis must also be understood as opportunity, for an expansion of the traditional understanding of evangelization.

Resigned priests and a significant number of others, have roles to play. The shortage of Catholic priests has generated no creative and forward looking hierarchical response. We've only seen bishops closing and consolidating parishes, importing priests from other countries who are minimally inculturated, and the use of re-tired priests for weekend Masses. These strategies fail to address these new, different, and growing realities!

The Challenge

I propose another approach, a different and more creative solution. CORPUS members, working from the grassroots, must revisit our charisms of preaching and teaching, addressing restrictions imposed if we undertook laicization, and ask if preventing us from exercising our charisms is valid and can be enforced. For those who secured pensions from their priestly service, this might be problematic, but for others no encumbered, there should be no obstacle.

Recognizing the world and church environments have changed radically over the past half century, we must also identify others who have these preaching and teaching charisms. Among them are women in religious life who have done advanced academic work in dogmatic and moral theology, Scripture, church history, and homiletics. Laity who have pursued the same academic tracts and are now active in teaching, pastoral ministry, and other forms of leadership also possess these charisms.

All of us are gifted if we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit and seek a new Pentecost that inspires, encourages, and supports us in a fresh evangelization geared to more reasonably meet today's sojourners where they live, work, and play.

We are called to fill the void! There is no indication that discipline of celibacy is going to change anytime soon; there is still a priest shortage; the foreign-born are not really effective in proclaiming the Gospel in a land foreign to them.

A CORPUS Reflection

Women are not going to be ordained within the Roman Catholic tradition any time soon, and a major divide exists in both church/society. We have a choice: we can allow the traditional death solves all problems to make us disappear or we can follow Pope Francis and both preach and teach the realities of Vatican II. This we must do in the name of the Holy Spirit and our own awareness of today's reality.

We can/should/must:

- set aside those meaningless prohibitions.
- start to repair the damage the bishops have done to their own credibility.
- proclaim the Gospel unencumbered by the weight of parish financial obligations.
- move beyond sex abuse, predators, and bishops trying to protect the church from those who hear the Gospel and understand that its mandates must not be controlled by exterior expediencies.

Are we still called to the freedom of the sons and daughters of God for the purpose of building the Kingdom? Today, envisioning the Kingdom needs all the help it can get!

Creating a Bridge

I write from a foundation of two separate and distinct realities. The first of these is The Tower of Power and Dr. Robert Schuller. I remember early Sunday mornings tuning the television to this program with the purpose of hearing Dr. Schuller's preaching. The man not only had a message, but his charisma was also possessed media savvy. He put his charisma to work in the real world.

The Catholic church has also been present in the television world, dating to Bishop Sheen and his catechetical charisma peppered with a captivating persona that facilitated easy acceptance of his messages. The church has continued its presence with greater/lesser degrees of success.

My perspective doesn't permit admiration or acceptance of Mother Angelica and EWTN. Nor does it afford celebrating Internet postings of Sunday Mass throughout the United States in various parishes, basilicas and cathedrals.

If one subscribes to America, the Jesuit magazine or National Catholic Reporter, more carefully prepared reflections on the assigned Sunday Scriptures are found in both these venues. There are a variety of other Internet sources where individuals undertake the same work.

