

Monastic Scribe L: April 28, 2023

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Have you read about the many people (millions?) who are leaving the United States to live elsewhere? They are giving up on the mess in which our country now finds itself. There are also many people who have left the institutional church after years of belonging, and, of course, many young people who have just rejected it. One of the characteristics of what is referred to as “postmodernism,” which began sometime around the seventies, is a great mistrust of institutions.

We are told that our most primary brain, one of three, is the reptilian brain which is concerned with fight or flight in the face of adversity. This is an important ability we have to deal with approaching danger. There are times when we must summon our courage and face up to a problem even if it might mean some discomfort or even suffering. Nobody wants to be called a coward and that means I need some courage to face a problem. But, at other times, we judge that we do not have the power commensurate with the problem and it is far more prudent to withdraw.

Pope Francis has said that a large problem among us, especially in developed nations, is indifference. We neither fight nor flee issues but simply ignore them. Are we having an environmental crisis? We may decide it is too inconvenient to take measures to cut down our carbon footprint or be willing to pay more to preserve the earth. Some would say that we have become a soft, spoiled people too used to our comforts. No comment!

Fighting or fleeing our church issues is another story. The church has suffered a momentous credibility crisis due, primarily, to the horrendous sexual abuse crisis. The crisis has been made worse by the complicity of our American bishops who failed to face the terrible evils committed. The bishops are also the cause of disgust for many young people who see many of them involved in the cultural wars of the nation, abetting the far right’s religious proclivities of white supremacy, religious nationalism, fear of immigrants, thus associating themselves with political positions, and neglecting to heed the teachings of Pope Francis and the Second Vatican Council. It is no wonder that many Catholics, raised in the church as children, have walked away from the institution. There are thousands of former Catholics who have joined other religions or no religion at all. They have chosen to flee.

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But other Catholics know that their Catholic faith is centered on Jesus Christ, not the bishops, and they are not willing to give up on their place in the church. Some Catholics may be just comfortable with the faith of their childhood and continue to come to Sunday Mass regularly. Maybe some still see it as an obligation, as a means to earn their passport to heaven. Some may have an intuitive sense that the Eucharist is real for them, a closeness to finding God in their lives. But others have awakened to see that their participation in the church contributes to bringing Christ, and gives real meaning, to their lives and the life of our society. And many of these have decided to fight to bring awareness to such issues as women in the church, integration of all peoples in a universal community, the place of all the laity along with the priests of the church.

Pope Francis has called us to help build a new church. Maybe it is, rather, a new way to being church. The Pope has recognized that the vision of the Second Vatican Council has yet to be accepted by large numbers of people, and these may be bishops and priests as well as lay people. Some even oppose this vision. The method that Francis has pointed out is the ancient Christian procedure of synodality. This is a procedure that demands people listen to each other and to all who want to partake. It is a procedure that demands individuals be willing to give up their own opinions but allow other opinions to be possible through periods of silence and prayer. It means avoiding cynicism and fatalism in order to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

Millions of people have taken part in such listening sessions and many come away with new hope. There has never been such a deliberation of people all over the globe. The national reports and the continental reports that have so far been issued are amazing for the agreement of people over the earth for their vision of what the church should be. These are the fighters. But, sadly, probably the majority of Catholics have no inkling of what has taken place. They are, as Pope Francis said, indifferent. A third round of reports will come out soon. Then in October a Synod of the People of God will come together in Rome to discuss, listen, pray over what has been said. Decisions will wait a second gathering in the Fall of 2024. This whole process is changing the church already.

The church as well as our nation are divided. There is a lack of agreement over basic value systems. Our values are coming from economic goals. We need faith communities to stand up for our deeper values. Are you a fighter or a flier? The

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People of God need you to fight. I am still in my corner of the ring at:
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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.