

Two by two

Jesus put his arms around Peter and Andrew and guided them up to the road. The two brothers carried only long walking sticks as they headed out, empty-handed and full of fear.

Peter looked at Jesus with pleading in his eyes: "I'm just a fisherman, Lord..."

"And a good one, too!" Jesus reassured, "but you are also a fisher of men. You can do this as well. You have the power and authority. Believe me!"

Both of them knew they must go on this mission into the towns and villages of Galilee. Jesus was sending them with instructions to take nothing with them. They would soon discover God's strength in their weakness.

Pausing at the road, Andrew and Peter turned to face Jesus. "Remember this," Jesus said. "You have the authority over unclean spirits. Preach repentance." They had heard these words of repentance which John the Baptist had preached. During the previous months they had learned from Jesus—by his preaching and by his example. Now, as the first disciples chosen by Jesus, they were the first being sent out alone.

"Jesus, we have nothing with us, no food, no coins, not even water to drink." Peter protested in a last, desperate appeal to reason.

Jesus answered with a patient smile. His eyes told Peter and Andrew that this was a test of their faith. If they truly believed that God would provide for them, then the first demons they must expel are their own demons of fear and doubt.

Jesus hugged them strongly, clapping their backs with his hands as if to pack down the fullest measure of his confidence in them.

Once Peter and Andrew had set out, the road that stretched before them was the familiar route that led south toward Tiberias. Beyond that were the villages.

They heard the noisy morning chatter of birds perched in the trees fronting the lake. Bright sunlight was dancing in the sky. It was a glorious morning and the sweetness of



life was upon them. Peter jabbed his walking stick into the ground ahead and Andrew echoed a rhythmic double tap with his own stick. Peter got the joke and they both began to laugh



If Peter and Andrew come to our house will we welcome them in? Will we give them food and water to drink, wash their tunics and give them a bed in which to sleep? Will we allow them to stay as long as they want?

Or have we already sent them away, causing them to shake our dust from their feet? Somehow these questions challenge us to examine the depth of our faith and commitment to being a follower of Jesus Christ.

POPE TO NON-BELIEVERS: “Let’s Talk”

Too often people use the words from today’s Gospel (*Shake the dust from your feet.*) to justify a position that we believers possess the truth, and if others don’t heed our words we should simply go on our merry way and disregard their friendship. However, a careful reading shows that Jesus requires more of us. He said only to move on if people don’t welcome you or listen to you. They need not heed your words, but rather, simply listen to what you have to say and welcome you to their table despite obvious disagreements. Our Pope seems to be taking his cue from Jesus on this.

“Now truth, according to the Christian faith, is the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, truth is a relationship! So true is it that each one of us also takes up the truth and expresses it from his/her history and culture, from the situation in which he/she lives, etc. This doesn’t mean that truth is variable or subjective, quite the opposite. But it means that it is given to us always and only as a way and a life.” –Pope Francis

A long time non-believer and news reporter called on the pope to answer a few of his questions. For many years this reporter was interested and fascinated by the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth and put to the pope questions about those who do not believe. His queries were sparked by comments that the pope recently made about non-believers followed by an initial recanting of those comments by the Vatican. Pope Francis responded to him with a letter. He was direct and to the point, answering in his usual pastoral style. The fact that Jesus was killed by those who did not believe in him should signal an obvious answer. For Christians, Jesus defeats death despite sin, not as some kind of spiritual “I-told-you-so.”

“This is, for the Christian faith, the certificate of the fact that Jesus is risen; not to triumph over those who rejected him, but to attest that the love of God is stronger than death, the forgiveness of God is stronger than any sin, and that it is worthwhile to spend one’s life to the end, witnessing this immense gift.”

The humbleness of seeking the truth is also a central element of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Lumen Gentium* which the pope references in his letter:

“The believer is not arrogant; on the contrary, truth makes him humble, knowing that, more than our possessing it, it is truth that embraces and possesses us. Far from stiffening us, the certainty of the faith puts us on the way, and makes possible witness and dialogue with everyone,” (#34) This is the spirit that animates the words that I write to you.”

Pope Francis seems to be making an attempt to quell the perception that the Church is arrogant. In short, discovering the truth isn’t an exercise in hoarding; rather the pope reminds us that truth can only be found within the context of relationship – an important point that many fail to see, or shrug off as unnecessary;

“Now truth, according to the Christian faith, is the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, truth is a relationship! So true is it that each one of us also takes up the truth and expresses it from him/herself; from his/her history and culture, from the situation in which he/she lives, etc. This doesn’t mean that truth is variable or subjective, quite the opposite. But it means that it is given to us always and only as a way and a life. Did not Jesus himself say: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”? In other words, truth being altogether one with love, requires humility and openness to be sought, received and expressed. Therefore, it is necessary to understand one another well on the terms and, perhaps, to come out of the tight spots of absolute positions to pose the question again in depth. I think that this is today absolutely necessary to initiate that serene and constructive dialogue that I hoped for at the beginning of this, my response.”

Pope Francis hopes to form a relationship with non-believers, and says relationship requires us to be in dialogue with one another. We need to learn from one another, but mostly we need to learn from the example of Jesus, who above all taught us how to love. To love even our enemies; to pray for those who persecute us. Jesus didn’t agree with the tax collectors and the prostitutes, but he would never have been accused of not loving them or of dismissing them. For people of good will – those who want and hope for the best for humanity – we can and should move closer together on what we can see as true and good and beautiful. We might not always agree, but Pope Francis hopes that it won’t be for lack of trying.



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