

A Hint on Spreading the Good News

Ascension of the Lord (Year A)

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Christianity has been presented to many of us as anti-world. The traditional language is to group 'the world, the flesh, and the devil' all in one. Like the sinful flesh and the tempting devil, the world is thought to be evil. In a certain sense, there are evil forces in the world. But equating the world with evil itself and therefore being opposed to it is theologically and spiritually problematic.

In today's Gospel, as the Risen Christ prepares to Ascend into heaven, he leaves us with one final instruction: 'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.' As the parallel Gospel passage in Mark puts it, "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." (16:15) This mandate involves a deep concern for the world and a desire to see the world transformed.

Going back to what I started with, if we are opposed to the world, this command of the Risen Christ is going to be extremely hard to fulfill. Why would we want to share good news with someone or something we are fundamentally opposed to? The problem with this way of evangelizing is that it unconsciously (or consciously for some) makes us want the see the world fail to prove our point. We really only want the Gospel to be good news for us.

A true evangelizer wants to share the good with the world. They do not hoard it for themselves or use it as a weapon against others. While not afraid to confront the evil in the world, they are not opposed to the world. Confrontation is allowed; opposition is not.

In the 20th century, the French Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin was one of the first in the institutional Catholic Church to question the presumed opposition between Christianity and the world. In fact, he loved the world and studied God's

creation as an archaeologist. He wrote, “there is nothing profane here below for those who know how to see.” (*Divine Milieu*, 66) In his eyes, the world and everything in it was an opening to the divine. Reflecting on the spirituality of Teilhard, William Dinges and Sr. Ilia Delio write, “the world, therefore, is not the problem. Rather, the problem is we do not see the world correctly.” (*From Teilhard to Omega*, ‘Teilhard de Chardin and The New Spirituality,’ 176) In other words, if we are opposed to the world and think the world is a problem, that says more about us than anything else. We are the ones invited to reconsider our outlook on life. For those who know how to see, the whole world is the potential receiver of the good news.

Hint: Following the command of the Risen Christ to spread the good news is much more effective whenever we are not starting from a position of opposition.

In my Christian mindset, am I opposed to the world?

Remember, we can still confront the world. We can still ‘drive out demons.’ But we do so because deep down, we really do want to see the world transformed. We really do want to baptize all nations.