

May 2, 2021 The Zeal of St. Peter: Several years ago, in response to a request by Bishop Hubbard, the priests of the Albany diocese gathered together for a three day convocation in Saratoga. It turned out to be a welcome respite from their daily duties and, in retrospect, really amounted to what could only be described as a spiritual retreat. In advance of the event, all priests were asked to fill out a form addressing many of the outstanding issues priests face in our church and culture at the present time. After compiling and analyzing all the data the keynote speaker, a psychologist, shared the results and his conclusions with all in the assembly.

He concluded that a large number of priests were simply anxious to retire. Too many had lost their passion and drive for priestly ministry. A smoldering fire had been extinguished a long time ago. Retirement was seen in a positive light. Evangelical fervor was sadly lacking.

We learn from the Acts of the Apostles, the so-called fifth gospel, that Saint Paul was a man famous for his zeal and his rage. He was a man on fire. As a devout Jew, he pressured and persecuted the fledgling Christian Church. He personally dragged men and women to prison. Moreover, he was present at the stoning of Saint Stephen, the execution of whom he gladly consented to.

After Paul had converted to Christ, he became a zealous and fearless Evangelist. Upon hearing of his conversion, many Christians were at first skeptical. They simply could not believe that the one-time enemy of the Church was a true disciple. Their painful memories of how many of their own were terrorized by him left them suspicious and afraid. Recall the words from today's first reading: "When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him, not believing he was a disciple". (Acts 9:26)

Barnabas assured his brothers and sisters in the faith that "Paul had seen the Lord and had spoken to him and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus".

Paul may have been a fanatic, but at the very least had passion. As a zealous Jew, he may have been moving in the wrong direction, but few could ever deny his deep commitment to his Jewish faith. He was a firebrand. Clearly he was not detached, laid back, and lazy. So successful was Paul's ministry that the Greek speaking Jews, his adversaries "tried to kill him". (Acts 9:29)

The loss of passionate intensity is a characteristic of our time among many Christian faithful. The indifferentism manifest in many of the baptized is, without question, detrimental to the mission of the church. God never made saints out of wimps! How can the Church expect to thrive if there is no enthusiasm for the faith?

In the Book of Revelation, the seer, speaking on Christ's behalf, has some harsh words for two of the early Christian communities.

To the Church of Laodicea: "I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth". (Rev. 3: 15-16)

To the Church of Sardis: "I know your works; that you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Be watchful and strengthen what is left, which is going to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God". (Rev. 3:1-2)

Let us ask ourselves if we have lost a passion for the truth and if our fervor for the Catholic faith has waned in recent years. Do we actually live the faith we profess? Do we speak out boldly in the Lord?

May the Holy Spirit, the Church's power source, come to our assistance and make us all worthy disciples of the risen Christ.

Amen!