

Confusion Needs Clarity

Many parishioners have come to me over these past years, and especially in this past month, expressing their difficulties with the confusion surrounding the Catholic faith these days. Their difficulty is not unwarranted. As if this second round of revelations about clergy sex abuse, even among the bishops and cardinals of the Church, were not enough, it seems like all of the settled teachings of the Catholic faith that we have taken for granted have been revisited and not handled with the care they always had been. And now they are muddled and confused in the minds of many. There are issues about marriage and family, the Church's moral teachings on human sexuality, as well as issues of life surrounding euthanasia and the death penalty. New topics such as ecology and economics and social justice have taken the forefront, while doctrine, dogma, and issues of personal justice seem to take a back seat. In the wake of the Amazon synod, the proper manner of inculturation and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a confused and muddled mess. What is the average Christian in the pew to do? I have asked the same question, too.

I have found solace and consolation in the new book by Robert Cardinal Sarah, entitled *The Day Is Now Far Spent*. The introduction to the book gave me a much needed shot in the arm. In it, he meditates on the figure of Judas Iscariot, relating the great scandal that this figure brings to the Christian faith. And yet, our Lord allowed it, permitted it to continue, even to the point of betraying the Divine Savior. But he also says that Judas is found within each of us, to one degree or another:

“Judas is for all eternity the traitor's name, and his shadow hangs over us today. Yes, like him, we have betrayed! We have abandoned prayer. The evil of efficient activism has infiltrated everywhere. We seek to imitate the organization of big businesses. We forget that prayer alone is the blood that can course through the heart of the Church. We say that we have no time to waste. We want to use this time for useful social works. **Someone who no longer prays has already betrayed.** Already he is willing to make all sorts of compromises with the world. He is walking on the path of Judas.”

These words of Cardinal Sarah gave me pause and caused me to examine my response to the crisis at hand. I realize that I have not prayed as I ought. I have not gone to the source and sat with the crucified Lord—whose face is beaten and bruised, bloodied and spit upon—and sought wisdom from that place. No servant is greater than his master. That is why I found also great comfort in the further words of Cardinal Sarah's introduction:

“Christians are trembling, wavering, doubting. I want this book to be for them. To tell them: do not doubt! **Hold fast to doctrine! Hold fast to prayer!**.... The devil seeks to make us doubt the Church. He wants us to regard her as a human organization in crisis. However, she is so much more than that: she is the continuation of Christ. The devil drives us to division and schism. He wants to make us believe that the Church has betrayed us. But the Church does not betray. The Church, full of sinners, is herself without sin!”

I would like to take up Cardinal Sarah's charge to **hold fast to doctrine and hold fast to prayer** as the pastoral plan that I propose going forward. Prayer comes first. “Without union with God, every attempt to strengthen the Church and the faith will be in vain.” “The one who prays is saved, the one who does not pray is damned, Saint Alphonsus said.” After prayer, comes a sincere emphasis on doctrine. “We owe the Christian people clear, firm, stable teaching....Where confusion reigns, God cannot dwell!”

In all of this, we must be careful to not mistake our prayer and insistence on clear doctrine to be a slap in the face of our ecclesial leaders, but rather a way of bolstering and upholding the faith that they are charged with proclaiming to the world. We hear clearly in the Scriptures that, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church,” (Matthew 16:18), and we are bound to follow the rock upon which Christ has established His Church. However, that does not mean we do nothing, but rather can assist Him with our fervent prayer and by making known our cares and concerns. We should also pray for our bishop, who has been set over us as the chief shepherd of our diocese, and accord the obedience and respect that is due to his office, for the good of his soul as well as ours. Pray also for your priests, including me. We all have our weaknesses, faults, and struggles, and yet by the mysterious action of Holy Orders, the laying on of hands, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, we have been entrusted with the sacred deposit of faith, and with the charism of teaching, sanctifying and governing in the Church. Cardinal Sarah says: “The most unworthy priest of all is still the instrument of divine grace when he celebrates the sacraments....If you think that your priests and bishops are not saints, then **be one for them.** Do penance, fast to make reparation for their defects and their cowardice.”

These are not the worst times the Church has ever seen. The Arian crisis of the Fourth Century, when Christ's divinity was questioned, nearly rent the Church asunder. At the height of the crisis, more than half of the Church was in heresy, and the faithful few were greatly persecuted, and yet the faith that we profess today stems from this faithful remnant, whom the Lord upheld in their time of distress. The political intrigues of the Middle Ages could not destroy the unity of faith, and the Catholic Church has remained faithful, even through the great ordeal of the Protestant Reformation. The Church will continue to remain faithful, even if only in seed form. The Lord promised, “...the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Let us do our part by prayer and fasting and holding on to the sacred deposit of faith handed down to us, and entrusted to us for future generations. Let us allow the faith to transform us and to fill us with the Holy Spirit's fruitfulness. **It is for us to bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**

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