

Introduction

We have processed the Vatican II changes and are in the threshold of a new millennium. The journey has been challenging and now, after more than four decades of reinvention and change, we seem to have settled into the routine of a new liturgy, new structures, new relationships, new roles and new responsibilities. Yet, we propose that we have not yet reached our destination. Instead, we suggest that change and innovation in and of itself is not necessarily progress and that we as Church in this third millennium are still very much a work in process. There is still much more to accomplish.

It is both interesting and possibly foretelling that the change we as Roman Catholics are experiencing as we enter this new millennium is not historically unique in our Church's history. These changes may very well be an indication of other great things to come, not only in the universal Catholic faith tradition, but possibly in other faith traditions as well. Other researchers have arrived at similar conclusions. For example, in her book *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle relates Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer's observation that "...the only way to understand what is currently happening to us as twenty-first century Christians in North America is first to understand that about every five every hundred years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale. We are living in one of those rummage sales in which empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at the time...must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur."

Bishop Dyer goes on to explain. "First, a new and more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity, which up until then had been the dominant one, is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self...And the third result is of equal, if not greater significance...Every time the incrustations of Christianity have been broken, the faith has spread and been spread dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity's reach as a result of unease and distress".**

Some would interpret the Second Vatican Council as the Roman Catholic Church's rummage sale and that the changes we made have resulted in a more vital form of Roman Catholic Christianity. One would also pray that any unease and distress that we may experience would encourage a greater reconstitution of faith for all faith traditions so that together we can fulfill the vision of Jesus at His last supper, "...that they all may be one, as you, Father are in me and I in you, that they also maybe one in us."***

Our Journey Continues

We as Church have journeyed a great distance, yet we cannot declare that we have arrived and that the opposite might be true. It may very well be that we as Church have not yet reached the peak and instead, we are still experiencing the challenge of innovation and change. We proposed that we are more likely very much a Church in transformation and it may be that we are simply resting as on a safe plateau just below the mountaintop, perhaps catching our breath and experiencing a sigh of relief as we prepare ourselves to make the final ascent.

The Catholic Church have made much progress. However, even though it may seem that all the pieces of the Church's puzzling future are in place, we cannot declare that we have completed our mission. Our journey continues. We have not as yet become the Church that we are intended to be in this third millennium. If this proposition has any merit, we must avoid falling into the proverbial "rut". Instead, it is time to rededicate ourselves and continue the ascent. Our only obstacles are humanity's worst enemies - apathy and malaise.

Change and Renewal

If we are to continue our ascent and accomplish our mission to become the Church we are intended to be in this third millennium, we must begin by questioning, "How are we doing as Church? Are we making changes sufficient enough to meet the challenges we are facing? Are we selling the good news of salvation properly?" We cannot simply pray and wait for things to happen. We must adapt a continuing attitude of change and renewal. Both the faithful and clergy together need to foster a greater enthusiasm for our faith, reenergize and challenge ourselves, be more proactive and make things happen.

Our message is simple. God became man in the person of Jesus. Jesus died for us. Jesus remains with us in the Eucharist, a spiritual and bodily holy communion of God and humanity. Jesus entrusted to us, His Church, the responsibility to continue His mission of salvation. By virtue of our Baptism, we are all called to live our lives as an "alter Christus", another Christ. For this reason, it seems only natural that we would ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?"

Everyone is a participant and everyone is a leader. As Baptized Catholic Christians, we may decide that it is now time to assume a greater leadership role both in our own lives and in the life of the Church. We must pull out all of the stops, muster all of our resources and make it possible for more people to participate actively in the Church's mission. Catholicism can no longer be considered a spectator sport. We cannot hold back or be complacent. Leadership in the Church is one of the most sacred of all trusts.

In order to fulfill our mission as Church, we must cultivate a caring community of warmth and acceptance, engender a more evangelistic spirit about our faith experience and strive continuously for perfection. This will require us to make every effort to become the best at who we can be, work to be the best at what we do and, by our example, let our "light shine before all God's people".

Church – A Work In Process

We suggest that we as Church, the people of God, are still very much a work in process. In order to meet the challenges of change and formation, we should devote more attention on the basics - the essence of Church - spirituality, sacraments, ministry and the experience of true community. Our earthly life is preparation for the life to come. We are not made perfect in a day, a week, a season, a year or even a lifetime. We begin each day anew. Each day is the first day of the rest of our life. Therefore, we too must rededicate ourselves to mastering our basics – faith and spirituality, community and ministry. Otherwise, our potential is diminished, our progress is much slower and the results are less satisfying.

In his Gospel John affirms, "...God is *Love*"****, in Greek - *Agape*. Agape love is a sharing in the spiritual supernatural nature and the love of our all-loving God. Agape love is the essence of our being and a spiritual model for humanity. Agape is the love that God revealed to us in Jesus, the supreme model of love. We demonstrate God's love in us by sharing that love unselfishly with others through ministry. Our ministry is a reflection of the love we share with God. Let us define our own lives and our ministry by agape – love itself.

The Church's challenge to change in this new millennium is both daunting and challenging. The good news is that change is a natural part of the human condition. Our nature as spiritual human beings thrives on the challenge to change, to transform and seek new horizons. On the other hand, if the vision and the goals are unclear, we are less able to respond to the challenges that change presents. In the absence of a clearly defined vision, we become complacent. However, unlike the frog, complacency may not cause physical death. Much worse, complacency anesthetizes the human spirit, in which case we do not die physically. We die emotionally and spiritually.

In order to meet the challenges of change and transformation, we as individuals and as Church cannot simply perpetuate the status quo. We must avoid settling into a comfort zone. We have not yet completed the transformation. Let us live our lives as the body of Christ, both as individuals and as Church. Let us long to hear Jesus say to us what the Master said to the good servant, "Well done my good and faithful servant...Come, share your master's joy." May I add my peace and blessing to you, all those whom you love and all those who love you. May we all journey together in community as we become the Church we are to be -

"The New Church in this New Millennium"!

* Revelation 3:15-16

** *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle, Pages 16-17

*** John 18:21

**** 1 John 4:8

Excerpts from the Book – *The Catholic Church in the Third Millennium*