

Reflection 10/04/2020

Background:

1st Reading

Paul is writing to Timothy after having left him in Ephesus and heading to Macedonia. Houses of worship were not to be built until 200 years after the days of Paul and did not come into general use until Constantine put an end to the persecutions of Christians. Churches met mostly in the homes of Christians with each small congregation under its own pastoral leadership. There were no seminaries so Paul had to develop his pastors out of converts and out of these there appeared false teachers such as Hymenaeus and Alexander who based their teachings on apocryphal Jewish legends connected with Old Testament genealogies.¹

2nd Reading

One of the most influential and important Christian leaders during the Early Medieval Period was Pope Gregory the Great (540–604 CE). Renown for his administrative prowess and ecclesiastical reforms, he helped solidify the Christian church as a pillar of European society for centuries to follow. One of St. Gregory's most famous works is the treatise, Pastoral Care (also known in Latin as Liber Regulae Pastoralis), a four-book exposition that offers guidelines for priests and bishops on how to wisely and biblically lead their churches and how to morally manage their lives.²

Reflection:

I am reminded that as Dominicans we are to keep one foot firmly grounded in scripture and tradition and the other in contemporary issues. How timely are today's readings! The problems that Paul saw in the early church at Ephesus have today become a tempest that at times seems to threaten the very foundation of the Church. I say seems to threaten as we have the certainty expressed by St. Augustine of Hippo that "this Church is holy, the one Church, the true Church, the Catholic Church, fighting as she does against all heresies. She can fight, but she cannot be beaten. All heresies are expelled from her, like the useless loppings pruned from a vine. She remains fixed in her root, in her vine, in her love. The gates of hell shall not conquer her."³

It is through the inerrancy of Scripture and Tradition and the infallibility of the Magisterium, that as members of the apostolate of the laity we "share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ".⁴ As lay Dominicans we are called to exercise the apostolate through "evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel."⁵

¹ Halley's Bible Handbook; p. 761-762

² <https://www.ancient.eu/article/917/gregory-the-great--his-pastoral-care/>

³ The Faith of the Early Fathers; Vol 3, Page 34

⁴ Apostolicam Actuositatem, Pope Paul VI; Nov 18, 1965.

⁵ Ibid

St. Paul, in his letter to Timothy and St. Gregory in his Pastoral Care treatise, are both acutely aware of the dangers that false teachers and lack of moral conviction amongst the clergy present. Today we are faced with numerous challenges both from within as well as outside the Church. There is at times, as St. Gregory illumines, a disheartening trend amongst the clergy and religious to indiscreet speech and imprudent silence that has the effect of leading and leaving the faithful both to and in error. Contemporary issues include but are certainly not limited to Catholic politicians supporting abortion, divorced and remarried receiving communion, gender ideology, and others.

The Code of Canon Law 204 gives us our “marching orders” as it were in our role as laity when faced with such issues. “In accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian Faithful, with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors, and with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons”.⁶

When we live as Dominicans we are supported by the four pillars of our charism; prayer, study, community, and apostolic activity. It is our apostolic activity that responds to the many challenges faced by the sojourning Church. As Pope Paul VI states;

An apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one’s way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. “For the charity of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). The words of the Apostle should echo in all hearts, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).⁷

When faced with timid pastors who *do not advance against the foe* or with clergy that fail to preach the Truth we are to remember that “everywhere and in all things we must seek the justice of God’s kingdom”.⁸

⁶ Code of Canon Law; n.204

⁷ Apostolicam Actuositatem; 6

⁸ Apostolicam actuositatem; 7