

Monastic Scribe XXXIII: August 11, 2022

CATHOLIC and/or catholic

In late July Pope Francis spent six days in Canada, principally to apologize to the Indigenous peoples of the land for what the Church did to destroy their culture and cause generational trauma. I was very touched by the sincere sense of penance and need for reconciliation that had been so badly needed. What gall, what hubris, did the first European colonists presume to display in their encounter with the first peoples of the North American continent. Now, I believe, is a graced time for all of us in America to bring to light what these people suffered, but also to hear what they still offer to us today.

What a contrast we witnessed in Boston, home of liberty, when a white supremacist group took part in our Fourth of July celebrations. These people are full of fear which, in turn, turns to anger and hatred. They are, principally, white Christian groups who want to preserve the country as a white, Christian domain. Not only the indigenous peoples, but Blacks, Latinos, Jews, Asians, immigrants, and any “other” foreigners are a threat to their exclusive vision of America. How sad it was when we witnessed, as part of the insurrection at the nation’s Capital on January 6, 2021, people waving Bibles as well as flags (American or Confederate) and yelling violent threats which some actually played out. White Christian Nationalists have a skewed vision of our country once being a Christian country but now threatened by all these “marauders” from outside.

How sad it was to realize there were Catholic groups taking part in this pitiful display. White nationalism, as Pope Francis has said, is contrary to the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church in the United States we need to recall, has been an immigrant church. Once upon a time Catholics were not welcome as well in this country. Why have so many forgotten? Why have the United States Catholic Bishops not condemned such outrageous displays of fear and anger? What are we afraid of?

Yes, we are changing. The latest figures I have heard portray the majority of Americans under eighteen years of age as not being white. The future will see this age growing. The human race began in Africa and moved across the globe. All our ancestors were once people of color, were immigrants, were strangers. They are a rich resource for the people of the land.

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I don't want to excuse the Catholic Church in this regard. The Church was hand in glove with colonizing nations and helped to subdue and suppress native peoples, their culture and customs. The Catholic Church has had its share of anti-Semitism over the centuries. The Catholic Church went along with the slavery of African people in this country. African-Americans were not admitted into religious communities of men and women and were kept separate in the churches well into the twentieth century. There is much to atone for. The Pope is leading us in penance for the sins of our ancestors. And many of us still have to face the fact that we subconsciously absorbed the systemic evils of racism, white supremacy, anti-Semitism and other similar movements. Still evolving is the Church's openness and acceptance of women in all its missions, and of people of varying sexual orientations.

James Joyce, the Irish writer (and a distant relative of mine) once said about the Church, "Here Comes Everybody". The Catholic Church is, by definition, a catholic church, that is it is universal (=catholic) in scope. It cannot be merely a national or local church though locally is where the church must find its expression. The early centuries of the church clearly taught openness to the poor, the marginalized. Paul wrote, in his epistles, the body of Christ is not Jewish nor Greek, Male or female. Since 1890 the modern Popes have been developing the ancient social justice teaching of the Church. We are all one people and the church is to be a visible sign of the unity of the human race. The Church is also the home of saints and sinners. It is for all people.

It is time to take a stand against any people or groups who want to exclude any people from the common table of nation, community or church. There are too many negative voices to be heard. Let us add our voices to the positive ones that embrace our best tradition and the leadership of Pope Francis. You can let me know what you think at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

N.B. The next edition of this blog will be in three weeks on September 2nd.

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.