

## Monastic Scribe XLIII: January 20, 2023

### **BROTHERS AND SISTERS – TIME FOR PILGRIMS!**

At Christmas time I heard comments by various people of how they wanted to have the Christmas their parents had given them. Nostalgia for something so beautiful eluded them and they wanted to go back. When we look at the wide-eyed innocence of children, we know we have lost something. I think that is rather understandable. But some people are very strong in always wanting things as they were at some golden time of their lives but they want them now.

Our church is currently split between people who regret that anything has changed since their childhood and those who feel more change is still needed. As believers we are beholden to tradition and to our ancestors. But we live in a different world. As a priest I feel I am in a different world than when I was ordained some years ago. I also feel a similar parallel to my growing older. As I age I look at the elders in our society. Some are wonderful witnesses to joy, gratitude, a sense of fulfillment. They are wisdom people who encourage the younger generations. But there are also bitter, unhappy elders who cannot surrender to old age and to God. They can find fault in many things that youngsters do. They want to go back to their old ways. It just doesn't work!

The Church has developed from its very beginning. The early Christians instituted seven ministers whom we call deacons. The assembly of believers came together and agreed to welcome gentiles into the New Way without requiring them to follow the Jewish ways. For 2000 years the church has adapted and changed expressions of liturgy, forms of priesthood, monasticism and apostolic religious life and many aspects of the faith. The eleventh century Gregorian Reforms brought some order into the universal church without ending change and development. Feudalism, Byzantine culture, the dark ages and the black plague, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and many other movements affected church development. Then came the Protestant Reformation. A defensive uniformity and stress on an unchangeable church took effect for the next 400 years.

The nineteenth century, following the Enlightenment and French Revolution, had many people waking up to the need for change. The liturgical movement, the scriptural and patristic roots of Christianity, the social justice tradition were explored. But the church tended to resist modernity. One Pope condemned the new-fangled railroad system. Another condemned democracy. Meanwhile the church ignored slavery as movements to abolish it were part of the secular world.

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In the desire to be right, correct and superior to other religions, it emphasized unchangeability.

Pope John XXIII who ministered in Bulgaria and France in the second world war recognized the need for fresh air in the church. The laity who had been treated as second hand members and were used to being passive, dependent on priests, and had been given little education beyond the catechism were called to holiness, active participation in the church and the Mass, sharers in the mission of Jesus Christ to redeem the world. The very meaning of our religious life in the church was to be changed from focusing on getting to heaven to the work of bringing the kingdom of God here on earth. All were called to share in the work of the gospel, in evangelization and missionary work, not by trying to make everyone accept our own beliefs, but by joyfully sharing what we believed.

The Second Vatican Council called for a veritable revolution. It is no wonder that some people still prefer the old ways where they could remain quiet, passive, dependent on priests, concentrating on individual devotional acts. It requires much more involvement both internally and externally, to embrace the Church of the Council which was patterned on the Church as Jesus began the Way. The system which Pope Francis has named clericalism made priests the centers of the faith. Many priests came to enjoy the authority, power and control.

“This is my parish” was heard by some pastors. And many lay people helped to contribute to keep the clerical system in place. They treated bishops and priests like little gods. We all are called to respect each other. In the church this does mean different ministries and functions. But paternalism, higher than thou attitudes, and reducing the laity to duties of “pay, pray and obey” do not bring us to the mind of Jesus Christ.

After the Council one commentator spoke of all of us as being either pioneers or settlers. Pioneers are open to change and development and are seekers, pilgrims. Settlers want to secure the hatches and keep everything in place. Where do you think you fit? You can contact me at: [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

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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.