

Disorder and Harmony

A couple of weeks ago, historian Austin Ivereigh, from Oxford – who lectured at Lemoyne last fall – and whose latest book is titled: *The Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and Struggle to Correct the Catholic Church*. In the interview, the Pope concludes that the pandemic could be a moment of creativity and conversion for the Church, for the world and for the whole of creation.

One question put to the Pope was: “How might the crisis move the church to rethink our ways of operating? Might the church become more missionary, more creative and less institutionalized?”

His answer was interesting:

“Less attached to institutions? I’d say less attached to certain ways of thinking. Because the church *is* institution. ... It is the Holy Spirit who institutionalizes the church, in an alternative, complementary way, because the Holy Spirit provokes disorder through charisms, but then out of disorder creates harmony. ...

“A tension between disorder and harmony: this is the church that must come out of the crisis. We have to learn to live in a church that exists in tension between harmony and disorder provoked by the Holy Spirit. [*This drives the Curia and the Cardinals crazy!!*]

The Pope then points out that the best example of how this tension between harmony and disorder is worked out in the Church is to look at the Acts of the Apostles which we are reflecting on during this Easter Season.

Our 1st Reading from the Acts today is a great example: There is a real crisis in the infant church, with a lot of high emotion. The Hellenists – non-Jews and some of the newest members the Church – were complaining that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food and necessities. Remember a few weeks ago, we read that in the infant Church “*They would sell their property and possession and divide them among all according to each one’s needs.*” Are these new folks being treated differently than others? Might there be a lot of tribalism going on here? Remember too, that widows were among the most vulnerable in society often lacking support or access to economic independence. In the Scriptures, widows are often categorized with orphans – powerless: there was no Social Security, Medicare, or 401(k)s in those days!

There is a crisis: a lot of *disorder*, but through the Holy Spirit a conclusion is reached that restores harmony: the Apostles got out of their box and realize they can't do everything by themselves; they need to share their authority...; and so created a whole new *order* in the church — the Order of Deacon — but not before they brought the problem to the whole community and found this new idea acceptable... and Stephen and the others were appointed to the Order of Deacon. *[And we know from other places in the Scriptures – as well as from Scripture scholarship – that women certainly were among those appointed as well.]*

This is an example of how the Church in crisis – guided by the Spirit – can live through the tension between disorder and harmony and ultimately change in a creative way.

The Pope then gives a personal example that he faced in the midst of our present global crisis:

He said: *“About a week ago an Italian Bishop, somewhat flustered, called me. He had been going around the hospitals wanting to give absolution to those inside the wards from the hallways of the hospital. But he had spoken to Canon lawyers who had told him he couldn't, that absolution could only be given in direct contact. ‘What do you think Holy Father?’”*

“I told him: Bishop fulfill your priestly duty;” and the Bishop said: *“Thank you. I understand.”*

The Pope went on to say: *“I found out later that he was giving absolution all around the place!”* He concluded: *“This is the freedom of the Spirit in the midst of a crisis — not a church closed off in institutions.”*

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So: sisters and brothers, as we continue our Easter journey toward the Feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, I would invite all of us to reflect, to discuss and pray how might this tragic pandemic be a game-changer, a moment of creativity, a moment of conversion — for our individual lives, for our families, for the Church, for the world and for the whole of creation...?

Let us live in that question.... In the following weeks, I hope to reflect a bit more on this question and today, conclude my homily with a beautiful video that might help us in our reflection – in our dreaming.... Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts!

<https://youtu.be/Nw5KQMXDiM4> : The Great Realisation