

Pastor's Pen: Lessons From History

The Spanish philosopher, George Santayana, wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Human nature is amazingly consistent. The trials, failings, and triumphs of humanity are replayed over and over again throughout the course of human history. The Book of Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun." On the one hand that can be depressing in that it might seem humanity is a slow learner. On the other hand, it can be of great comfort in that we can look to how our ancestors overcame obstacles and apply these principles to current circumstances.

While meeting with my spiritual director last Monday, when asked how I am dealing with the subterfuge of the latest rounds of clerical scandals, I told him I was looking to how the great saints of the past handled scandal and discord within the Church. No part of our history as a Church has been unscathed by scandal. From Judas Iscariot on, the Church has had to deal with the human condition of her members. She has endured multiple scandals, heresies, schisms, and political infighting. Yet, she still stands and continues to grow. This is much more to the credit of the grace of God than the maneuverings of human wisdom. We can learn from history how God has moved us boldly in the past to be a healing force in the present. We can utilize today the same principles that helped us overcome hardship and scandal in the past.

A few years back, I picked up a book by Mike Aquilina and James Papandrea called "The Seven Revolutions: How Christianity Changed the World and Can Change it Again." This book opened my eyes to a great many things. First, it reminded me of the harsh climate under which Christianity found itself in its infant years. Its teachings were so radically different to the pagan world around it that it was deemed dangerous by the pagan world and was persecuted. Second, I was reminded that in so many ways, our society is re-paganizing. The pagan world was always on our doorstep throughout the centuries. So many scandals that have erupted over the two millennia of the Catholic Church have come as a result of elements of the Church trying to adapt pagan ways of thinking and acting. Third, it reminded me that just as Christianity was able to overcome an intensely pagan world, so it can overcome this re-paganized culture again.

Over the course of the next seven weeks, I will break down these seven revolutions. I was planning to do this as an adult education class, but my schedule will not permit it. I am teaching an age appropriate level of these topics to our 6th and 8th graders in the parochial school. I hope to have the authors of this book in fall of 2019 to delve into these topics more. We will do this as a Day of Reflection. I do this because I wish to give us hope. It is easy to look at the situations in our society and the scandals in our Church and lose hope. If we can see the hard work done by our ancestors, if we can see their faith, perseverance, courage, and love then we can turn to the same God that inspired them to inspire us. There is no need to forget our history and who we are. We do not need to be condemned to endless loop of self-perpetuating mistakes. We can leave a stronger parish and society for our children...if we are willing to do the work.