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Planned Giving News



Office of Stewardship Development

January 2010

Dear Greg,

I have delayed this month's eNewsletter because of the tragedy of the Haitian earthquake. I know you will join me in praying for the repose of the souls of all those who lost their lives in this disaster. Our prayers also go out to the surviving family members who lost loved ones and for healing to those who were seriously injured.

I am always amazed at the overwhelming outpouring of support following natural disasters. It is encouraging to see so many people from so many countries respond to a specific need, whether it be traveling to physically assist those who are desperate or by way of generous donations of food, clothing, and monetary resources. We experience telethons, concerts, direct telephone solicitation, and other appeals to raise public awareness and resources to help. If we could only tap a fraction of this energy and these resources for the ongoing needs of our local churches and for the domestic homeless, it might make such a difference.

As we start this new year of a new decade, let us consider what we might be able to do to tap this energy to lead others to Christ. We started the year with the tri-diocesan effort of the *Catholics Come Home* initiative. If nothing else, it has brought a dearth of comments and reactions from those who have drifted away from the Church as well as from those of other faith traditions. As it is often said, press, both good and bad, raises awareness. This, from my observations, has certainly been the case with Catholics Come Home.

This poses the question: What can we do at our parishes to continue this momentum? Programs like *Catholics Returning Home* are certainly one way to help reintegrate those returning. However, the personal touch by the pastors, staff, and parishioners to create a welcoming environment is most necessary. Let us all work toward this goal of creating and maintaining a welcoming environment.

I have included below an article authored by Dan Conway. In it he makes the statement: *Faith and culture both tell us what to do, what to value, and what to believe. In our modern culture, the highest value is personal freedom -- the right to do whatever we choose without the interference of others.* Is that what it's all about? I hope you enjoy it.

God bless,

Greg Urban

Faith and Culture Are Both Inside Us, Both Tell Us What To Think And Do

In his book, *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion and Culture*, Cardinal Francis E. George writes, "Culture is a normative system, and so is faith. If the faith and culture clash or disagree, as they always do to some extent, it is because faith is a gift from God and culture is a human construct. There will be tension in us because the faith and culture are both inside us."

Faith and culture both tell us what to do, what to value, and what to believe. In our modern culture, the highest value is personal freedom -- the right to do whatever we choose without the interference of others. For faith, the primary value is obedience to the will of God. According to Cardinal George, "in a secularized culture, belief in an almighty God, an all-powerful God, seems a threat to human freedom." Seen with the eyes of faith, God creates us from nothing and saves us from our sins. Properly understood, there is no way God can be an impediment to human freedom. "But in a secularized culture," Cardinal George writes, "God is implicitly, in some sense, a rival, a competitor to human beings, a threat."

The most obvious example of the clash between faith and culture in contemporary experience is the fundamental disagreement about human life issues -- especially abortion and euthanasia but also the full range of issues concerning sexuality, contraception and even the definitions of marriage and family. Faith tells us that life is sacred, that only God can choose between life and death. Our culture objects to anyone other than the individual person (or their surrogate) exercising authority over these personal, private decisions. Faith tells us that we are called to follow Jesus Christ as disciples who find true freedom in surrendering to the will of the Father. Subtly, but with great influence, modern culture bids us to become disciples of the latest fad or fashion or celebrity even as we claim to be totally independent.

At the heart of these disagreements, Cardinal George says, is a crisis that goes beyond moral choices to the most basic question of human existence: Are we the dependent creatures of an all-powerful God, or are we ourselves gods-free to do whatever we please without regard for the personal or social consequences?

"I would argue that the primary crisis at this moment, and always," Cardinal George writes, "is a crisis of discipleship, of conversion to Jesus Christ individually and socially within his body, the Church. Next, there is a crisis of marriage for life and for the sake of family." Discipleship, first and foremost, and then marriage and family: These are the two most important issues facing us as individuals and as a Church. First, are we free to do as we please -- or does true freedom come in surrender to the will of God? And, next, are we free to redefine marriage and family according to the values of our culture -- or does faith require us to see things a certain way, God's way, in spite of what we are taught day-in and day-out by the persistent voices of our secular culture?

For people of faith, these are stewardship questions. Faith is the gift we received at baptism. It is the gift we have been called to nourish and sustain and share with others by living as disciples of Jesus Christ. Prayer and the sacraments and the practice of daily Christian living teach us to surrender to the will of God. Sacred Scripture, preaching at the Sunday Eucharist, and the catechesis we receive through lifelong faith formation are all needed to help us distinguish God's will from our own wants and desires. As Cardinal George teaches, "the call of Christ himself, in the liturgy, in public devotion, in private prayer, has to be heard by every Catholic as a call to conversion."

We are called to follow Christ, not culture. That means being responsible stewards of the gift of faith. It means finding freedom (and truth) in the Gospels and in the lives of the saints, not in the lifestyles of the rich and famous. It means separating ourselves from what may be politically correct at this moment, and aligning ourselves with what is always good and true.

Faith and culture are both inside us. Both tell us what to think and do. How will we decide between them? As Cardinal George says, that is the primary crisis at this moment, and always. May the grace of Christ help us to choose wisely and well. *May we be good stewards of the gift of faith now and*

always!

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Just a Thought

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." MATTHEW 6:19-21

What to Give?

Some people neglect to consider tax consequences when they are ready to give a gift to the Church. While there are many ways a donor might consider giving, each may have a different consequence on the following April 15th. With careful planning, both the charity and the donor can benefit.

I encourage you to visit a website created to help donors and advisors promote gifts to charity. The content on this site explains and shows by example the tax consequences of different gift types in order to maximize the gift. Visit [Planning Perspectives - Maximizing Your Gifts](#).

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