

LIFE AND WELLBEING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Let us pass over

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Today's readings: Job 38:1, 8-11; Ps 107:23-31; 2 Cor 5:14-17; 1Mk 4:35-41

Last March, McKinsey and Company published previsions of when the COVID-19 pandemic, depending on "crucial variables", will effectively pass over, enabling the world to transition to "normalcy". Last year, Pope Francis too proactively set up an expert commission to map out, in collaboration with international organisations, plans for a better world beyond COVID-19. Also last week, during the local Church's ongoing formation programme for priests, various academics and experts presented the results of surveys on the impact of COVID-19, prognosticating what the future might be.

To be truthful, one must admit that certain conclusions and observations have been written on the wall for years. COVID-19, at last, presented unalienable facts to those who still chose to live in denial

instead of facing the truth of the signs of times, calling us to willingly pass through a radical process of transformation.

Jesus's request to his disciples – "Let us pass over to the other side" – is godsend in these present times of change. As we are compelled to proactively look to the future, it is worth pondering, in the light of faith, on Jesus's invitation, in today's Gospel, to pass over. For the disciple this implies a readiness to "leave behind the crowd" and "take him along". The passing over (*diérchomai*) during the night from one shore to another, over the waters, has paschal connotations and undertones.

The Jewish *pesah* was first and foremost the angel of death's passing over the homes of the faithful as well as the crossing over to the other shore from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the desert towards the promised land. Jesus's own *pascha* then, is the mystery of his passing over from death to life.

Here, radical transformations take place in the lives of those who willingly "pass over to the other side". The movement is not merely indicative of change, as everything is subject to change, and this independently of our willingness to accept or to resist it: Everything is marked by the law of change, hence everything is impermanent. In this light, Jesus's invitation takes us to another level, that of willingly embracing change in such a way as

to grasp the opportunity to go through it and be radically transformed by it.

The Jewish Passover transformed the Hebrews from slaves to a free people; the Passover of Jesus transformed him from a dead man to "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). The Christian faithful, in virtue of their baptismal immersion, are defined by this powerful dynamic of transformation in Christ who is always ahead of us, permanently inviting us to pass over and renew ourselves. It is really sad to see that, as Christians, we tend to resist change more often than we would like to admit, only to realise that we desist from allowing God to radically transform us, our vision, structures, and our way of doing things.

On the boat passing over in a "furious squall", as the Twelve face their inner fears and anxieties, Jesus sleeps in the stern, as in the midst of inevitable change, each and everyone has to ultimately shoulder responsibility for their own transformation. No one can shoulder it for us, as we are expected to keep watch and be proactively prepared for what is to come.

Jesus points to the virtue of faith as the pillar of inner "stillness" which enables us to see clearly and to willingly go through a process of "renewal which cannot be deferred" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 27-33). Then, "let us pass over".

Tolerance in an age of relativism

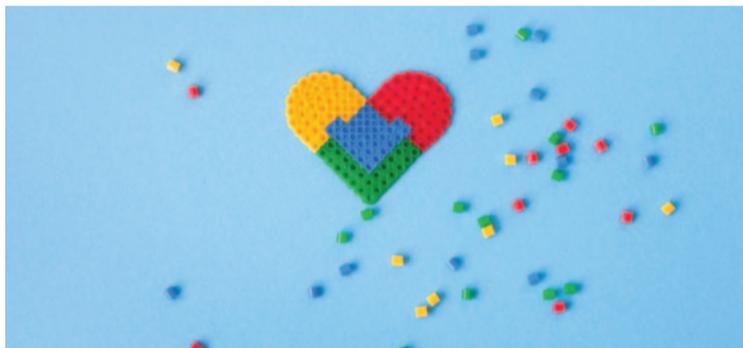
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people, including Christians. It is not easy to be a tolerant person when your values are being questioned, and you are certain that these different values can be harmful to society and do not lead to the common good.

The big paradoxes arise from public office when governments legislate on matters that are morally unacceptable to Catholics. The divide between laity and religion is manifest in laws on divorce, gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia. This reflects what Pope Benedict XVI called the dictatorship of relativism, described in his address in Ontario, Canada, in 2006: "Recognising nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires".

The Church cannot approve what is morally wrong, and is expected to express itself without hesitancy on what is good and what is wrong. It understands that human weakness in governing and in society can lead to wrong decisions and policies, and while not conceding to what is wrong, it tolerates what diverges from truth and justice to defend emphatically what is good, and avoid greater evil.

The matter is as complex when politicians who genuinely



We have a duty to treat everyone, regardless of their beliefs, with charity and mercy. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

espouse Christian principles are faced with such difficult choices, and where their individual conscience and not political expediency should guide them on the decisions to take.

Tolerance is a means that can help us in the search of truth. In John 12:47, Christ says "if anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world".

As Christians we have a duty towards the human person, which means we have a duty to treat everyone, regardless of their beliefs, with charity and mercy. We are now in the realm of love, which goes beyond the definition of tolerance.

Pope Francis is widely considered as the messenger of tolerance. He has shown great love towards people of different beliefs and religions by visiting countries ravaged by religious wars and violence and where Christians are in a small minority. He conveys the idea that tolerance towards humanity is good for both society and the soul.

The Pope unequivocally shows his respect towards the human person, but expresses himself against the evil of racism, hatred, organised crime, abortion, euthanasia and violence that negate human life and its right to live in peace and prosper.

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QUOTES & NEWS

Church schools and clinics seized

The Eritrean bishops are protesting against the government decision to nationalise schools and clinics:

"The schools and clinics confiscated or closed, or about to be confiscated or closed, are the legitimate property of the Catholic Church, built, established and organised in the supreme and exclusive interest of serving our people. We will never cease to demand the return of the social institutions forcibly taken from [the Church] and the right to perform all the services of which she has been deprived."

Poverty the result of selfishness

The Vatican issued the Pope's message for the World Day of the Poor to be celebrated on November 14:

"How can we give a tangible response to the millions of the poor who frequently encounter only indifference, if not resentment? What path of justice must be followed so that social inequalities can be overcome and human dignity, so often trampled upon, can be restored?"

"Yet poverty is not the result of fate; it is the result of selfishness. It is critical to generate development processes in which the abilities of all are valued, so that complementarity of skills and diversity of roles can lead to a common resource of mutual participation."

Warehousing of old people

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, in a recently published book, wrote: "My heart goes out to the people who worked in nursing homes and hospitals and tried their best in harrowing circumstances. A virus on the loose, people dying, families yelling at you. The lack of concern for any real reflection on this is scandalous. You and I have talked about the need for a rethink of how we care – or don't – for our elderly. Families have all kinds of challenges, and sometimes the medical concerns require help, but the warehousing of older men and women shouldn't be."

(Compiled by Fr Joe Borg)