

Re-rooting Our Lives in Christ: John Paul's Agenda Shows How

Fr. John Dreher concludes a three-part series of reflections on the visitation message, then and now.

God is still offering the enticing graces of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord and baptism in the Spirit. For those people and in those parts of the world where this Good News is being heard for the first time, this is probably the primary way in which He is acting. For those who do not respond, however, God in time gives us more bitter graces that expose our sin and cause us to repent. God subjects to trial what little faith we have in order to

strengthen it. We need to search for and welcome these graces.

The priestly sexual scandals must be seen as God's purification. Bishops have become the focus of the blame, especially their failure to protect children and to correct the wrongdoing. We priests need to examine ourselves and see if we have failed to correct, probably not sexual abuse so much, as other wrongdoing. For example, have we let doctrinal or liturgical error go unchecked? Do we care for our

brother priest enough to give him some "tough love" when it is called for? Our shame at exposure in the media will pale into insignificance when compared to our shame before the glory of God.

"Putting the axe to the root":

The biggest mistake we can make at this time is to focus on sexual abuse and leadership issues and avoid the deeper purification that God is after. I am very afraid that we try to avoid purification. If we fail that grace, what recourse does God have but to cut us off the vine? The sexual scandals are bad fruit. Picking them and throwing them away will not stop the production of bad fruit. The axe must be laid to the

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This group of "sidewalk inspectors"—with safety vests, goggles, hard hats, *et cetera*—clearly set out to create an impression. They are only members of the Providence Fraternity with Fr Tim Graff. These goodly men went on tour of the impressive, "Big Dig", the Central Artery/Tunnel Project through the heart of downtown Boston. The party went 125 feet below street level, going, they say, under the Fort Point Channel without getting wet. At the end of the tour, to put a seal on the mile and a half journey, two members of the group left their impression on the newly-constructed Charles River bridge by stepping on to some wet concrete.

Statistical note: Some 15 million cubic yards of earth has had to be removed for the project. Some went to land fills around the area and a large portion created a new island in the Boston Harbor. To understand what this means: if every truck load of dirt was lined up bumper to bumper the line of trucks would begin in Boston and end up at the Panama Canal. The project which began in the 1960s has cost so far about \$14 billion.

How to create an impression!



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St. Paul writes in his magnificent Letter to the Romans: "None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rm. 14.7-8).

What a comforting reflection for the month of All Souls! In life and in death we belong to God. Even death, as final as it seems, cannot sever the bond of love our Father has for us—love stronger than death!

It struck me that this is also the month of Thanksgiving, the time we celebrate that wonderful day of praise and giving thanks for the incredible providence of our Father. We Americans focus on the Pilgrims and the beginnings of our nation where "under God" we survived as a people.

I put these two celebrations together in my mind and began to reflect on those who have gone before us, more especially my own personal loved ones, and I could not help but give thanks for the gift they have been and still are to me; dear ones who in the Communion of Saints intercede for me before the throne of God, and even those who depend on my intercession to hopefully soon be before the throne of God.

I next began reflecting on the priesthood and those priests who have touched my life and, in a real way, helped form my vocation. I gave thanks for them to the Father. I also reflected on those brother priests who have gone before us in the Fraternity of Priests. Notably I thought of Fr. Jim Ferry, one of the early Fraternity Pilgrims, and of Fr. Forrest Rouelle, who led us with such a "zeal for the brothers". Again I gave thanks and praise.

I thought of the deceased brothers from my own fraternity in Providence. In our twenty years or so of existence, six brothers have died. As their faces came to mind I smiled and uttered a prayer of thanks. They were faithful and holy men. I then reflected on the many past intercessors and donors who have supported us in prayer and financially over the years. From many countries we have

formed and still form a body, the Fraternity of Priests, all working toward the betterment of Christ's holy priesthood. What an awesome enterprise! And to think that in life and in death "we are the Lord's."

I'd 'like to offer and suggest this brief reflection for your All Souls prayer and your Thanksgiving preparation. At this time of year

when the weather turns colder and the days grow shorter, reflect on those who have preceded you and praise the Lord for who they have been in your life.

Our prayers continue to be with you, our generous intercessors and donors. I will be offering a special liturgy for all your faithful departed with a special intention for those of you who have lost a loved one this year. Let us together praise the awesome Father for all His "saints" who have touched our lives. I ask you too to join me on Thanksgiving Day to thank the Father for the priests who have gone before us, especially those of the Fraternity of Priests (I'll also be thanking God for all of you!).

Thank you again for your prayers and generosity over the years.

In Christ,



Fr. John



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root of the tree producing the fruit.

What is the root? Here is where our discernment together can be especially valuable. I believe the root is lack of faith in Christ and a “turn to the world and to man.” The root cause is that we have failed to invest our hearts, minds and lives in the living Lord Jesus Christ, while investing them in something short of or other than Christ. We can take a worldly and human-effort approach to the Catholic faith. The whole body is infected and needs strong medicine.

Repent and believe the Good News

“Come, follow me”: The strong medicine is ongoing conversion to Jesus Christ. Back in the eighties, the Fraternity taught to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to re-rooting our priesthood in Christ and to hearing God, but we did not go far enough. Our conversion to Christ is not complete until He is able to do the Father’s will in us!

The clearest examples we have of ongoing conversion are the apostles. They were good religious men before Jesus called them. As they lived day by day with him, their lives became more and more centered on and absorbed in Him. After three years, they surely thought they had arrived. But Christ’s death was death for them as well. Their world-view and their ego-strengths were shattered. They went through a real death to self. His resurrection appearances began to open them to a reality beyond here and now. His ascension opened a door on a supernatural universe. In faith, mind and heart,

they finally reoriented their lives from earth to heaven. The sending of the Spirit at Pentecost was the generation of the Life of Christ in them. The Spirit of Christ became the animated principle for their lives, both personally and ecclesially. No longer was He along side them but within them. His discipleship of them continued, but from within.

The Pontificate of John Paul II: The “everlasting framework” of God’s grace does not change. The challenge to faith and pastoral ministry is to find the way into it from where we are in a given configuration within the Church and within the Church’s historic and cultural situation in the world.

We in the Fraternity need to take up that agenda (of the Holy Father) as our response to God’s visitation

Pope John Paul II has opened the way both by his personal life and by his pontificate. As a young man, he found the way out of the worst the modern world had to offer – the totalitarian regimes of Nazism and Communism. It was by a personal faith in Christ and holiness that he survived. Now as an old man, he continues to instruct by his life, his vitality and his love. His pontificate is unsurpassed in pastoral initiatives and its depth and range of teaching. In the decades after the Second Vatican Council, the Church fell into a debilitating polarization regarding the correct interpretation

of the Council. As he enters his twenty-fifth year, it is clear that his pontificate is the authentic interpretation of the Council.

The Holy Father has explicitly set the agenda for the Church. We in the Fraternity need to take up that agenda as our response to God’s visitation. Its main lines will seem very familiar. For example, the subtitle for the “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in America” reads as follows: “On the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America.”

So, God has made provision for us. We can specify what “repent and believe the Good News” mean for us at this time. We need not wonder where we are to find guidelines for the life of faith or the agenda for pastoral ministry. The Lord has given them to us in the pontificate of John Paul II. If we have not paid much attention, we can begin our repentance right there!



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A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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