

Presentation to SFO National – October 3rd, 2007

“The Spirit of Assisi tells us that faithfulness to one’s own religious conviction, and especially faithfulness to the Crucified and Risen Christ, is not expressed in violence and intolerance but in sincere respect for the other, in dialogue, in a proclamation that appeals to freedom and reason and in the commitment to peace and reconciliation.

The failure to combine acceptance, dialogue and respect for all with the certainty of faith which every Christian, like the saint of Assisi, is bound to foster, proclaiming Christ as the Way, the Truth and the life of man, the one Savior of the World, can be neither an evangelical nor a Franciscan attitude.”

-Homily of his Holiness Benedict XVI to Assisi on the Eighth Centenary of the Conversion of St Francis at the Eucharistic Concelebration in the square outside the Lower Basilica of St Francis, Sunday, June 17th, 2007

Furthermore, *“The Church is herself called to be an effective sign and means of reconciliation and peace for the human family. Despite the serious issues which divide us, our present degree of unity in Christ is nevertheless a sign to the world that Jesus Christ is truly the Prince of Peace....*

...Our prayer here in the Spirit of Assisi should include repentance for our failures as Christians to carry out the mission of peace and reconciliation that we have received from Christ and which we have not yet fully accomplished. We pray for the conversion of our hearts and the renewal of our minds, that we may be true peacemakers, bearing a common witness to him whose kingdom is a ‘kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace’....

...It is the same Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth, whom we ask today to enable us to discern the ways for mutual understanding and forgiveness. But prayer for peace must be followed by appropriate action for peace...

The way of peace passes in the last analysis through love....”

-Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities Gathered in Assisi, Cathedral of St Rufino, October 27, 1986

As the controversy grew over the selection of a particular speaker for your SFO Quinquennial Congress, let it suffice to be said that I was a little more than relieved to “google” the event and find nothing chronicling the situation. It would have been a grave public scandal. Not the discussion per se; but the growing presence of an attitude that for me is unsettling. For as I became more and more aware of the growing opposition, I also became aware of some correspondence that, although in keeping with the Franciscan family’s tradition to historically be at odds with each other over living the life; were filled with, what I could only consider to be violence in nature and intolerant in words. These two have never, and should never, have a guest plate set out to welcome them at the Franciscan family table.

As it is written in sacred scripture Luke 6:35-38:

Be merciful, just as (also) your Father is merciful.

"Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

The scriptural footnote found for the passage (USCCB website) makes it clear that these words are not a prohibition against recognizing the faults of others, but against passing judgment *in a spirit of arrogance*.

In looking to discover a comparable situation in the church for guidance and direction on this point, I did not need to look any further than to April 2007 in my own backyard within the St Louis Archdiocese.

It was at that time that Archbishop Burke resigned his position from the Cardinal Glennon Children's Foundation in lieu of a fund raising event that would include a performance by the singer Sheryl Crow. His reason for his decision was based on her public stance as an outspoken abortion advocate and her active public campaigning for the passage of Amendment 2 which created the right to clone human beings and destroy human beings, as embryos for research. In the words of the Archdiocesan website in regards to this issue it was stated that

"Her performance for the SSM Cardinal Glennon Medical Center is contrary to the identity and mission of the Catholic institution. In addition, the Church sees the action as giving scandal, which is defined as 'an attitude or behavior which leads another to evil'.

Scandal becomes a grave offense if the action leads another to commit a grave offense. Her performance will give the appearance that the Church is not consistent in its belief and practice for the protection of innocent human life."

What is of the most interest to me, and pertinent to us, is how the issue was handled by the Archbishop:

- The question was raised "Why not allow her to help raise money for a medical center that helps children with cancer?" Answer: "***Our judgment does not rest on the nature of the performer's beliefs***, but on ***her public advocacy*** for actions that will result in the deliberate killing of innocent human beings"
- The question was raised "Why is the Archbishop coming out now in opposition just days before the event?" Answer: "As soon as he was made aware of the event, ***he began private conversations*** with the president of the Board of Governors of the Cardinal Glennon Children's Foundation".
- "Will this position alienate Catholics?" Answer: "The action is ***meant to unify the faithful*** and ***preserve Communion*** with the universal Church"..."*It is the Archbishop's responsibility to address moral and pastoral matters in this area of health care and the understanding of the healing ministry of the Church*".
- A final question of interest was raised. "What about the people who already bought tickets?" Response: "***The desire to show support to the medical center is commendable***. It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors and other

responsible people in the medical center to make sure the fundraising events are consistent with the Catholic identity and mission of the institution”.

If you were to go online and “google” Archbishop Burke accompanied by the name, Sheryl Crow; you will discover a YouTube video of his formal address on this issue. One comment following my viewing of the video caught my attention. The person wrote: “*I almost cried at a number of points in the video message. It was not so much due to his words but **with the great humility with which they were spoken**”.*

And that is the fundamental point of my sharing this example with you this morning. His focus throughout the ordeal was on **the well-being of the hospital and its leadership**. In his words “I pray that the mission of the hospital will be strengthened”. It is the fine line difference between being fundamentally right and becoming adamant to the point of self-righteousness. It is the difference between passing judgment with a degree of arrogance rather than strongly expressing one’s concerns with all humility. Within the context of the Franciscan family, it is my firm belief that **persons take priority over positions**. The virtue of humility is to always be front and center in the life of any one aspiring to Franciscan ideals.

I recall a conversation I had with a number of Lay Missionaries of Charity over “Who would get credit for a possible miracle of healing that took place in the life of one of their members?” The situation was this: A member was gravely ill and the region began a prayer vigil through the intercession of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. A priest showed up in the hospital room to administer the Sacrament of Anointing for healing and left with the family a copy of a prayer to St Francis of Assisi for them to say-which they did with all sincere devotion. The person recovered. If they were healed through the intercession of Blessed Mother Teresa then this could be one more recorded miracle towards her canonization-but what if it was through the miraculous intercession of St Francis of Assisi? It would be back to the drawing board for the canonization cause for Mother Teresa! My response, which I truly to have been inspired by the working of the Holy Spirit through the joint efforts of Mother Teresa and St Francis, was: “Knowing the deep humility of our founder Francis of Assisi, he would naturally defer the honor to Mother Teresa.” “Is that true?!” they said. “I have no doubts about it”.

Two Franciscan Sources

1. The story in the Assisi Compilation (#84)/Mirror of Perfection (Chapter 9, #101)
2. At the end of his life he calls his followers over to read from Jn. 13:1-17 Washing of Feet – We will hear it proclaimed at the Transitus Service tonight....As a sign of humility, we will take the opportunity to act it out now...

The actual washing of feet followed by

- Begins the Book of Glory in the Gospel of John
- Takes its place at the point in John's narrative where the Synoptic Writers place the Institution of the Eucharist

Reading: Col 3:12-17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,

bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.

And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- Notice that St Paul places these remarks into a liturgical setting as we move into the celebration of the Eucharist