

Out of Darkness, Colour breaks

Brother Philip Pinto, cfc

“We are in a period in which public and even ecclesiastical approval must be second to the needs of those who look to us for both vision and voice.”

What do I notice happening in our world today that is changing the way I live my life?

What do my brothers and sisters say to me that makes me question the beliefs by which I have lived in the past?

What is energizing me and giving me hope in the midst of all the negativity around me?

How am I naming the way I love, the meanings I make, and my and the world's needs?

I do not believe that we are living any more in a time of transition. That is too tame a word to describe the upheavals taking place. I believe we are in a time of chaos and more than ever we need to be aware of the action of the Spirit hovering over the waters and calling forth life.

We know now that it took eons for that primeval life to emerge, and it will take great patience and waiting on our part for clarity to be revealed. “We must once again become attentive to the clear and powerful language of the spiritually charged presence.”

A time of chaos demands risking. The only real ‘sin’ in such a time is that of inactivity, of waiting for the dust to settle before we do anything. The call today is to risk acting to the best of our ability, knowing that only this will allow the future to unfold.

This is a time to beseech God to rescue us from the limited vision that we have grown accustomed to. This request is at the heart of our search for new life. My sisters and brothers, we need new eyes to see a new way of living that will allow us a freedom that we never knew before. This is the core of the Jesus vision and the Jesus teaching.

What would it mean to be radical disciples of Jesus today?

We know that Jesus wanted followers, not fans! He did not call disciples to worship him, but to follow him. It is not about worshipping Christ so much as following Jesus.

Can we be as radical in our time as the first followers were in theirs?

What if, for example, baptism meant that you could no longer be a soldier – because you could not kill?

What if following meant opening our communities as places of real hospitality to those who have no one to hear their story?

What if following meant an anti-imperial way of living so that we share from our substance in these difficult times and lend money without taking any interest?

What if we gave everyone the benefit of the doubt and learned to live non-violently?

What if discipleship was taken seriously as we fought against losing our soul in a consumerist society?

What if women were truly equal?

What if a contagious joy was the hallmark of our assemblies or community meetings?

What if our communities were truly safe places where we realize that we all need one another just as we are without any need for protective masks?

What if we consciously allowed our cultural barriers and sense of self to be questioned and challenged and extended, so that we really knew and valued those we label 'the stranger'?

In Jesus we find one who is constantly calling on us to break out of the boundaries that we find ourselves in, or should I say we bind ourselves in. We are prone to fix ourselves within boxes that have labels like 'mine' and 'yours'. We organize things into neat categories and draw lines around what is acceptable behaviour.

And the poor and disadvantaged are always the ones outside the boundaries and separated by the lines we draw. People must know their place, we say. And it is always said by those on the right side of the line, those with something to protect.

For so long we have based our religious observance on beliefs and propositions.

***We worry about the real presence
and the virgin birth,
on the two natures in Christ
and the infallibility of the Pope,
about Transubstantiation
and the Immaculate Conception.***

***But when one reads and reflects on the Sermon on the Mount,
the heart and soul of the Jesus vision,
what the early Christians
referred to as The Way,
we find nothing about what to believe
but an alternative ethic,
a way of behaving,
a way of living life.***

***Jesus was telling us that there was another way of living life,
another way of relating to people,
and he called us to change the world from the inside.***

***It is about behaviour rather than belief.
We are invited to embrace what is truly eternal.
And what is truly eternal is love!***

You and I are called to be the agents of change. We are not here to conquer the world but to illuminate it – new sight, salt of the earth, light of the world. A bland Christian or a bland religious is a contradiction in terms! If salt loses its saltiness, of what use is it?

Albert Schweitzer when asked who was the greatest person living at that time, said: The greatest person in the world today is some unknown one, in some obscure place, *who has gone out in love to someone in need.*

And so, in a time when our numbers are rapidly decreasing, when our ministries are being taken over by lay people who (hopefully) are giving them new shape and spirit, when our presence is almost invisible in society, what are we being called to be and do?

It is as if God is saying to us that in our present state we are irrelevant to our world. Are we then the equivalent of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago? Must we die so that something else can be born? I believe that the apostolic nature of our calling as seen in our public ministry is being very adequately taken over by lay people.

It is very clear to me that now our primary role is to witness to the radicalism of the Gospel through the search for God and through sharing that search for God with others.

We are called to be a new type of Church, one truly centred round the radical and disturbing vision of Jesus. At our best we know what it is. It is the only way to ensure a future full of hope.