

Homily

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Feast of St. Clement

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Last weekend a dear friend invited me to make a visit with him to the battlefields of the Somme on its 100th anniversary. It was a moving, if somewhat depressing visit as one remembered that more than 1 million young lives had been sacrificed, with very little discernible gain in territory. Among them 3500 Irish soldiers were killed, not to mention the wounded. From Australia 23,000 young men died.

Once again today we are in a time of strife. France, after the tragic killings in Paris, has seen its President declare war on terror. This week some reports suggested that some form of attack might occur here in Rome.

Perhaps it is good then to repeat today's second reading:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom 8:35-37)

Pope Francis in his Angelus address for Christ the King yesterday explained some key distinctions when he said:

Worldly logic rests on ambition and on competition, it does battle with the weapons of fear, extortion, and the manipulation of consciences. The logic of the Gospel, which is the logic of Jesus, expresses itself instead in humility and in giving freely, it quietly but effectively asserts itself through the power of truth. At times, the kingdoms of this world are built upon arrogance, rivalry, and oppression; the kingdom of Christ is a "kingdom of justice, love and peace" (Preface).

We must then begin to answer that deeper challenge of seeking the truth when it is not always clear. How do we respond to today's challenges? To aid in this task I wish to return to the address given by Pope Benedict at the University of Regensburg in November 2006. He addressed magnificently there—and I encourage you to all read it once more—the underlying battle that goes on in our world between faith and reason. Reason needs faith and faith needs reason.

Pope Benedict identified in Islam a strand of faith unable to contemplate God as *logos*, reason. Faith in the one good God cannot have anything to do with violence against the innocent. This would be inherently unreasonable, and be contrary to the God who is *reason* itself.

However the Pope also recognises other challenges. He states:

In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid. Yet the world's profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures. At the same time, as I have attempted to show, modern scientific reason with its intrinsically Platonic element bears within itself a question which points beyond itself and beyond the possibilities of its methodology. Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as a given, on which its methodology has to be based.

What has all this to do, you may ask, with the great Saint we celebrate in our Solemn Mass this evening?

Pope St. Clement is vitally important in pointing us to some of the fundamental building blocks of our Christian culture. One of those is none other than the Rock-man, the rock, St. Peter whose 266th successor is Pope Francis. Pope St. Clement falls within that unbroken line of successors but also forms part of the Apostolic Tradition to which Christians began to appeal. At times when the New Testament canon was not complete and the Scriptural teachings were disputed, in times when traditions in communities varied, the early Christians turned towards those communities which had maintained the apostolic traditions based on their apostolic founders, especially Rome founded by Peter and Paul.

St. Clement was a great promoter of this way of thinking. We can thank St. Clement for his clear teaching in his letter to the Corinthians where he asserted the apostolic authority of the bishops/presbyters as rulers of the church. In many ways that teaching has persisted providentially down to our own time, almost without challenge, and we continue to look also to the successor of St. Peter as that guarantee of unity in doctrine and practice. The successor of St. Peter is the rock to which we attach ourselves when the sea becomes rough, when the waves seem to threaten the barque of Peter which is the Church. It is particularly noteworthy that if St. Peter was the rock, so soon after him St. Clement will be portrayed with an anchor as indeed he is here in this Basilica consecrated in his name. This remains a potent symbol of the solidity that the Papacy brings to the Catholic Church.

In a world, then, filled with violence, both historically and presently, the Church continues to be a beacon of hope, a sure guide. Some have wanted to say of the recent Synod, that the Church is confused and confusing in her teaching on the question of marriage. This is not the case. The Church's teaching on sexuality, marriage and family continues to be based on Jesus' own teaching about adultery and divorce; while St. Paul's teaching on the proper dispositions to receive communion also remains essential on the vexed question of the impossibility of communion for the divorced and civilly married. Such a "possibility" was not even mentioned in the Synod document.

We now await the Holy Father's apostolic exhortation, which will express again the Church's essential tradition and emphasise that the appeal to discernment and the internal forum can only be used to understand better God's will as taught in the scriptures and by the magisterium and can never be used to disregard, distort or refute established Church teaching.

We pray again tonight for our holy father Pope Francis as he prepares this teaching, like St. Clement, to clarify for the faithful what it means to follow the Lord, in His Church, in our world. Let us pray on this feast of St. Clement for Pope Francis, that he will continue to teach and exhort us to follow the truths of the faith which are always stronger than an arid horizontal secularism.

Pope St. Clement, pray for us.

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