

January 15, 2017

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Here we are, Lord. We come to do your will

Jesuit General Congregation 36

During this past October and November, Jesuit leaders from around world-wide held what is called a General Congregation in Rome, the 36th since the mid-16th century. In it, they discerned how the world-wide Jesuit Community is being called to minister to a changing world. I would like to share some of what they came to, not that you might know what we Jesuits are to do, but that we all might learn what we are all called to do.

Ignatian - Jesuit - spirituality is fundamentally a lay spirituality. Ignatius in the 16th century had his conversion as a layman. A few men gathered around him who found through his conversion their own, and though they eventually formed into an order of priests, their spirituality remained lay. So how Jesuits are led spiritually is how all followers of Jesus Christ are led spiritually.

GC 36

One of GC's decrees is particularly pertinent to us all. It is Decree 1 titled, "*Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice.*" I'd like to read some excerpts from this decree because what it is saying to us Jesuits, it is saying to all Christians.

"Since the last general congregation, we have situations of heart-breaking conflict in many parts of the world. There has been devastating loss of life and massive displacement of peoples. These conflicts have a global reach.

"We are always seeking to know and follow the will of God for us. We do so by gazing upon the world "*that has been groaning in labor pains until now.*" On the one hand, we see the vibrancy of youth, yearning to better their lives. We see people enjoying the beauty of creation. We see the many ways in which people use their gifts for the sake of others.

"And yet, we see people humiliated, struck by violence, excluded from society, and on the margins. The earth bears the weight of the damage human beings have wrought. Hope itself seems threatened; in place of hope, we find fear and anger. With the Psalmist, we cry out, "*Show us, O Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation.*" (Ps. 85:8)

"This crisis has deep spiritual roots; it saps the hope and joy that God offers. One practice that can animate Christian kinship is spiritual companionship, which touches us most deeply. Such creates an atmosphere of trust and welcome for ourselves and others.

“It is critical to emphasize the relevance of real closeness to the poor. The poor challenge us to return constantly to what is essential to the Gospel, to what really gives life, and to recognize that which merely burdens us. Pope Francis reminds us we are called to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voice to their causes, to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God shares with us through them. With the poor, we can learn what hope and courage mean. We hear the call to rediscover hospitality to strangers, to the young, to the poor, and to those who are persecuted. Christ himself teaches us this hospitality. There is no authentic familiarity with God if we do not allow ourselves to encounter Christ who is revealed in the suffering, vulnerable faces of people, indeed in the suffering of creation.

“In the face of attitudes hostile to displaced persons (refugees, migrants, and internally displaced peoples), we see an enormous growth of wealth and power in the world that comes from an enormous growth of inequality. The present dominant models of development leave millions of people, especially the young and vulnerable, without opportunities for integration into society. Indigenous peoples and communities, like the Dalits and tribals in South Asia, represent these groups. In many parts of the world, women especially experience such injustice. We are called to support them in their struggles, recognizing that we have much to learn from their values and their courage. The defense and promotion of human rights and integral ecology is an ethical horizon that we share with many other people of good will, who are also seeking to respond to Christ’s call.

“Fundamentalism, intolerance, and ethnic-religious-political conflicts are a source of violence that is all the more appalling because it is motivated and justified by distorted religious convictions.

“Poverty, social exclusion, and marginalization are linked with environmental degradation. The current economic system with its predatory orientation discards natural resources as well as people. The direction of development must be altered if it is to be sustainable. We as Christians are called to help heal a broken world, promoting a new way of producing and consuming, which puts God’s creation at the center.

“Because of the magnitude and interconnectedness of the challenges we face, we must support and encourage growing collaboration with others. The mission of Jesus Christ does not belong to us exclusively, we share it with many men and women consecrated to the service of others.

“We know that, amidst the difficulties and challenges of our time, God never ceases to labor for the salvation of all people, indeed of all creation. We believe that God continues his work of *“reconciling the world to himself in Christ.”* We hear the urgent summons to join the Lord in caring for the neediest and to extend God’s mercy to where injustice, suffering or despair seem to thwart the divine plan. We pray for the courage *“to dare the audacity of the ‘improbable,’* as we respond to God’s call with the humility of those who know that, in this service where the human engages all his energy, everything depends on God. Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!”

As I’ve mentioned, this was written for Jesuits, but it applies to us all. The call of Christ is to everyone - to you and even me - today, right now! Christ’s call is not about particular belief systems or spiritual practices, it is primarily about attitudes. My actions come out of my attitudes, and if I don’t have loving and healthy attitudes, i won’t have loving and healthy action.

So I offer you for your own reflection two typical Jesuit questions:

*What am I doing for Christ’s people today?
What ought I do for Christ’s people today?*

*Lord our God, you are the father of peace to our world. Let your peace grow in our hearts and in the hearts of world leaders. Let it spread to people in all parts of the world and to all who believe that your love can lead our world. We ask you this through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Mary Queen of peace, pray for us. Amen*