

Reflection for 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

Just under a fortnight ago, the world of social media froze as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram were no longer available for several hours. The impact of this depended in which part of the world you were living in and what time of day it was. Listening to a discussion the following day, I became aware of how many people have grown up with “Social Media” as the norm and that it is just part of everyday life. In time, people will speak to future generations about the impact of the pandemic, and they might curiously ask what all the fuss was about as it becomes something confined to history. Things have changed. We find ourselves in a different space and for many a different place too. The post-pandemic church is now beginning to shape itself in a way that two years ago that we would have thought impossible.

We are now beginning to realize that a new language of faith is called for to address the current challenges and the so-called new pastoral reality. This is a new landscape and a new map of faith that we are confronted with. We don't have a plan or an APP that we can download. However, we cannot go into reverse either. We need to go forward in faith aware that we are being presented with challenges that are very different for the church even since the turn of millennium. A lot has happened since then and it is perhaps hard to see with the eyes of faith where the church is going. It has had to navigate different encounters and events that have called for a radical response rooted in the gospel. Throughout the world, the church, in the different continents, has had to face new challenges. Because of the Internet, we hear about these challenges within hours of them happening. It is easy to lose our vision of faith and our sight of God. Perhaps, these words from Cardinal Peter Erdo of Hungary may encourage us to look at the Church and the world through a different lens of faith as we face the challenges as we emerge from the pandemic.

“All of this means that the Christians regarded their community as a sacred community that also had its own discipline, as well as its doctrine, and this discipline dated back to the apostles and, in the end, to Jesus Christ. And this discipline was regarded to be sacred as doctrine or the liturgy. A secularism that would result in the denial of the transcendence seems somewhat old-fashioned because today we see many signs of uncertainty about where the limit is when we speak of immanence and transcendence. What is on this side? What is beyond? Where is the line? I see among the intellectuals a deep uncertainty in this regard, more than a dogmatic reduction of all reality to the level of the immanent, of what is tangible and sensible, denying the existence of anything transcendent or eternal. Immanent with respect to what? Because before, the claim commonly made by materialism was that which we cannot see, that which we cannot touch, does not exist. But that was the popular understanding. Already Lenin knew that this is not enough to define matter. He referred to matter as all that exists regardless of our conscience.

But this is good, now we are on familiar ground. Because in this sense, matter no longer has any limit. The most important thing, then, is to seek perfection, as Aristotle did. So you can put forth the question of God even without the category of matter. Because the line between the transcendent and the immanent does not seem so clear, and that is why many are open, many have an interest in any religious movement, even in modern spiritual movements. People have a lot of interest. But there is great uncertainty. Where is the boundary between this world and beyond this world? Our knowledge of astronomy, or physics [can provide answers], but perhaps even these methods also must be put into perspective, in the sense that we have to be humble and know that these sciences provide wonderful and new data, but we do not discover all aspect of reality with them. So, the immense space for a personal God, a God that we say is transcendent with respect to the entire universe, not only remains, it also always reopens in a new way.”

Robert Moynihan & Viktoria Somogyi, **“Guarding the flame: The challenges facing the Church in the twenty-first Century: a conversation with Cardinal Peter Erdo,”** pages 240-242