

22nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

August 31, 2014

Do not conform yourselves to this age

Readings: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16: 21-27

If you have ever driven on Highway 52 in southern Minnesota, beyond Rochester, undoubtedly, you have seen the road signs indicating the presence of horse drawn buggies in and around the towns of Canton and Harmony. In Harmony, about 100 families of the “Old Order” Amish live, having come to Minnesota in the early 1970’s. An Amish community in Long Prairie, MN was in the news a decade ago due to an outbreak of Polio, the first outbreak in the United States in a generation, all because the Amish do not immunize their children. It is based upon their aversion to conforming to the modern age.

How are we to interpret this admonition, this warning “not to be conformed to this age”? For years, I avoided purchasing a cell phone, knowing that it was not necessary. After becoming a pastor, that all changed quickly. Have I now conformed myself to this age? I suspect people would say “No,” as cell phones are now entirely commonplace. There are many other forms of technology that I have not embraced, some that seem like fads to me, but we’ll see.

Jesus himself provides the perfect balance in his discourse during which he tells his disciples to be “in the world, but not of the world.” We must resist the temptation to yearn for an age that no longer exists. That will not help the situation. This is our time and the challenge is to transform the world by means of the Gospel. At the same time, we are to hold fast to the ideals of the Gospel, especially when they are questioned, challenged or dismissed.

Being “conformed” to the age is not to be equated with making use of the developments and advances of a modern age. Vatican II produced a document entitled, *Gaudium et Spes* “The Church in the

Modern World”. Yes, the Church embraces advances in science and technology. Faith and science are not enemies, but we have too easily seen the negative results when science and human learning are divorced from faith. In the enlightenment, man’s pride was at its zenith. Reason became the god for some.

It is equally true that we can see the dangers of a so-called faith that is divorced from reason and tradition in the lives of the radical jihadists who are bringing terror upon innocent people, and whose threat seems to be growing. These unspeakable acts are to be condemned in the strongest possible language. The Middle Eastern Patriarchs and Orthodox Church leaders have called upon the international community to eradicate terrorist groups.

The bishops noted: “The very existence of Christians is at stake in several Arab countries—notably in Iraq, Syria and Egypt – where they have been exposed to heinous crimes, forcing them to flee.” They continued: “What is painful is the absence of a stance by Islamic authorities, and the international community has not adopted a strict stance either.”

We have many blessings and issues of faith will never be definitively shelved in favor of a secularist approach. But let us continue to be vigilant, because a creeping secularism can easily invade our own thinking. Let us also be ready to make important distinctions about those areas of progress that are compatible with our faith, lest we treat all that is modern as contrary to the faith.

We are in the world, even while we are not of the world. With our eyes focused on the Lord, this is a very good place to be.