

22nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

September 3, 2017

Do not conform yourselves to this age

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

Occasionally, when going out for dinner I make my way to West 7th St., typically unaware of what may be going on at the Xcel Energy Center. If it is a concert, I have now less than a 50/50 chance of even recognizing the name of the act. This forces me to consider the degree to which I am or am not attuned to things of modern culture.

In our second reading Saint Paul urging the brothers and sisters not to be conformed to this age. It is a great line to be sure, but at the same time it is somewhat vague, perhaps even deliberately. People of faith and good will interpret some of these passages differently. What does it mean to be conformed to the age?

For years, I avoided purchasing a cell phone, believing that it was not necessary. Only after becoming a pastor in 2006 did I see its value in a new light. Have I now conformed myself to this age? I do not maintain a Blog, nor am I on Facebook, but I do post my own columns and homilies, knowing just enough to do it. I am still not exactly sure why Twitter is so popular, but this does not mean that I criticize people who make use of these forms of social media.

But where does one draw the line? Being conformed to the age is not the same thing as making use of the developments and advances of our modern age. Vatican II issued a document entitled, “The Church in the Modern World.” It taught:

The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.¹

¹ Gaudium et Spes, paragraph #4. Promulgated on 7 December 1965

Yes, there is progress in history, and the Church acknowledges this. She is not the enemy of technological progress and scientific advances. But those advances must be evaluated in their totality, against the backdrop of their conformity to apostolic tradition.

Faith and science are not enemies, though we have too easily seen the negative results when science and human learning are divorced from faith...think of the enlightenment, man's pride at its zenith. Reason had become a god for some. In today's society, politics has become like unto a god.

We do have many blessings and issues of faith have not been definitively shelved in favor of a secular approach. Pope Francis said this to the 44 young people whom he confirmed, coming from 22 different nations shortly after beginning his ministry in 2013:

Remain steadfast in the journey of faith, with firm hope in the Lord. This is the secret of our journey! He gives us the courage to swim against the tide. Pay attention, my young friends: to go against the current; this is good for the heart, but we need courage to swim against the tide. Jesus gives us this courage!²

These words could just as easily be said to you and to me. Let us pray for the grace to be ready to make important distinctions about those areas of progress that are compatible with our faith and those that are not. It was into this moment that the Lord sent us.

The clock is not going backwards; we cannot recreate the halcyon days of old, for that is not our call. We must however try to transform the world in which we live today, imbuing it with the Gospel. Jesus has told us that "We are in the world, even while we are not of the world." With our eyes focused on the Lord, that is a right place to be.

² Holy Mass and Conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Peter's Square, April 28, 2013