



September 13, 2009 The Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

“He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take his cross and follow me.’”—Mark 8:34

Dear friends;

Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest, a brilliant scientist (paleontologist—he was on the dig that discovered Peking man), theologian and poet. He desired to reconcile evolutionary theory and the theology of that time. His work was threatening to the theological status quo. So he was silenced by the Hierarchy and his superiors were to see that he not speak on theology. The hierarchy was even less inclined to dialogue in those days than they are today.

He was obedient but not foolish nor stupid. He willed all his writings to a lay female friend. The laity has much more freedom in these matters. So when he died on Easter Sunday 1955 she became free to publish all his work (Which now seems to be getting the hierarchy’s approval of late, the pope recently quoted Teilhard in a recent homily). His work opened the door for new insights into God who is the creative force behind our evolving universe.

I am sure the order to be silenced must have been personally painful. It is never easy to be told that you cannot express your thoughts or your understanding. In some ways such commands could seem to be a personal rejection of your deepest self. Sigmund Freud said that one of the most painful sources of suffering in our lives can come from our relations with others. It must have seemed so for Teilhard.

Yet Teilhard was able to write about suffering in a positive way. In “L’Energie Spirituelle de la Souffrance,” *Oeuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, Seuil, Paris: 1955-1965 (The Spiritual Energy of Suffering, from the Works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin) he wrote that Christianity plays an important role with its revelation that suffering, if rightly embraced, can be transformed into an expression of love. Suffering, while it still is an opponent is able, at the same time, to help us by uprooting selfishness and egoism. Stripped of all pretenses we can become completely focused on Christ and God.

This is what Jesus is telling us when he invites us to take up the cross. We must learn to live for him and the Kingdom of God. It is our egos that lead us to be like the elders and chief priests who seek to judge and condemn. And in the need to judge rather than bear suffering graciously we inflict suffering—because somehow our egos need it to survive and feel safe.

I recently heard the story of pain being inflicted on another by a “good Catholic.” This good Catholic woman (another parish) felt the need to tell her neighbor (a mother who just lost her son to suicide) that she as a good Catholic would not be going to the funeral of her son. And she could not understand how a Catholic Church would hold the service since he basically committed murder on himself. This “good Catholic” had no compassion and no love. Are we not called to bear one another’s suffering rather than aggravate it?

All the nostalgia for the “good old days” seems to be resurrecting some of the horrible and evil things of the Church of days gone by. Some of it was as evil as anything the scribes, elders and Pharisees did to Jesus. Jesus calls us to compassionate, self-giving love. That means letting go of our egos—especially our religious, self-righteous egos.

Suffering invites us to a choice to become compassionate or bitter. Bitterness comes when we build up walls to defend our egos. Compassion is gained when we cast our egos aside for the sake of love. Let us follow Jesus and lose ourselves for his sake and that of the Gospel.

Peace,

Fr. Ron