

October 21, 2018: Meditation on Reforming the Church

Dear Parishioners,

On Monday I will be flying to Italy to walk the Way of St. Francis. This is a pilgrimage and I will walk the over 120 miles praying for Holy Rosary, especially by praying the Rosary. My prayer will be that we can be like St. Francis who reformed the church of his day, which had elements of corruption, by becoming something beautiful for God. Francis was a man who conformed his life completely to Christ and the Gospel.

On the feast of St. Francis, Oct. 4th the *Magnificat* publication had a meditation by Georges Bernanos. I came into contact with Georges Bernanos when I read his famous novel “The Diary of a Country Priest” some years ago. I found the novel to be very compelling. George Bernanos was a famous French Catholic author with tremendous insight. This Meditation, which is reprinted here, was written more than 70 years ago, but is timely in light of the increasing societal tensions and the sexual abuse crises in the Church. I love the line where he says “*what the Church needs is not critics but artists*”. This is what St. Francis became, an artist. I hope you enjoy this reflection by Georges Bernanos.

“Whoever pretends to reform the Church with...the same means used to reform temporal society—not only will he fail in his undertaking, but he will infallibly end by finding himself outside the Church. I say that he finds himself outside the Church before anyone has gone to the trouble of excluding him from her. I say that it is he himself who excludes himself from her by a kind of tragic fatalism...

The only way of reforming the Church is to suffer for her. The only way of reforming the visible Church is to suffer for the invisible Church. The only way of reforming the vices of the Church is to lavish on her the example of one’s own most heroic virtues.

It’s quite possible that Saint Francis of Assisi was not any less thrown into revolt than Luther by the debauchery and simony of prelates. We can even be sure that his suffering on this account was fiercer, because his nature was very different from that of the monk of Wittenberg. But Francis did not challenge iniquity; he was not tempted to confront it; instead, he threw himself into poverty, immersing himself in it as deeply as possible along with his followers. He found in poverty the very source and wellspring of all absolution and all purity. Instead of attempting to snatch from the Church all her ill-gotten goods, he overwhelmed her with invisible treasures, and under the hand of this beggar the heaps of gold and lust began blossoming like an April hedge.

Ah, yes: I’m well aware that in these matters comparisons aren’t worth much, especially when seasoned with a little humor. Would you still allow me to say, however, in order to be better understood by some readers, that what the Church needs is not critics but artists?...When poetry is in full crisis, the important thing is not to point the finger at bad poets but oneself to write beautiful poems, thus unstopping the sacred springs.”

In Christ,

Father Vincent