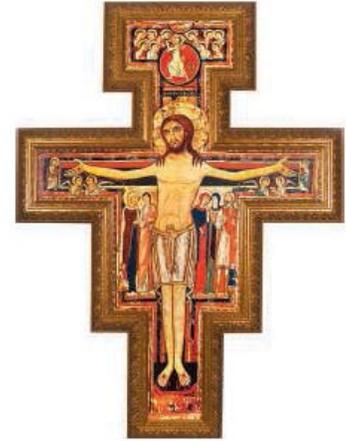




May 12

Renew My Church: Are There More Thomases Among Us Today?

"Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20:19-31)



Several weeks ago, we considered some of the reasons why renewal is needed, not the least of which is a steady decline in faith practices that stretches back decades. There are many issues that people cite as a catalyst for leaving the Church or lapsing in their faith. The pain and suffering of the abuse crisis and failure in leadership amongst some has been reason enough for some to walk away or refrain from (re)entering. There are also the age-old allurements and noon-day devils that cause people to drift away from the faith of their youth.

And there are also issues and challenges of a personal nature that only God can see within people's hearts.

But there are also people that leave the Church not because they reject her teachings or doctrines or even because of the scandals – they leave because they want more than what they're experiencing. In some way, they doubt that Jesus is present within their own parish. For those of us who know and love and serve our Lord present in the sacraments, this may be difficult to get our minds or hearts around. But it's a reality for some.

Before his election as Pope Francis, then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio and the bishops of Latin America studied the reasons why Catholics leave the Church to join Evangelical Protestant groups. Below is very short summation of what they found cited in their report known as the Aparecida Document. Amongst those who left the Church to join other faith communities did so because they:

- Never experienced a profound and intense personal encounter with Jesus Christ
- Did not have meaningful community life where they felt accepted, valued, visible, included
- Had an unmet desire for biblical and doctrinal formation as something that brings spiritual growth (not merely as theoretical formation and cold knowledge)
- Were seeking a missionary commitment that moves church members from the pews to go out and meet those on the periphery

As you read these points, ask yourself if you identify with any of them. Does this sound like anyone you know who has drifted away or decided to join a different faith community?

If we can understand why it is that many people leave, especially those who are searching for a stronger connection to Christ, a community, and a missionary impulse, we can begin to see where it is that renewal is needed within our own parishes.

So, where do we start?

More to come ...

As always, for more information, visit RenewMyChurch.org