

Good Steward Newsletter – January 2012



The New Evangelization and the New Year

In a recent speech to bishops from the state of New York who were making the visit to Rome that is required of each bishop every five years, Pope Benedict XVI returned to two of the themes that dominated his visit to the United States in 2008: the sexual abuse crisis and the new evangelization. The pope's speech was the first of five major addresses that he will give as the American bishops journey in 15 regional groups to Rome *ad limina apostolorum* (to the threshold of the apostles).

Concerning the sex abuse scandal, which has recently spread to several European countries, the Holy Father once again committed the Church Universal to “exacting standards” of transparency and decisive action to ensure the safety of our children and to deal with allegations of abuse as they arise. “It is my hope that the Church’s conscientious efforts to confront this reality will help the broader community to recognize the causes, true extent and devastating consequences of sexual abuse, and to respond effectively to this scourge that affects every level of society,” the pope said.

Pope Benedict’s second theme was “the urgency and demands of a new evangelization.” The pope said that during the coming months he plans to offer “a number of reflections” on this topic for the bishops’ consideration as they lead their dioceses in today’s “dramatically changing social and religious landscape.”

“Many of you have shared with me your concern about the grave challenges to a consistent Christian witness presented by an increasingly secularized society. I consider it significant, however, that there is also an increased concern on the part of many men and women, whatever their religious or political views, for the future of our democratic societies. They see a troubling breakdown in the intellectual, cultural and moral foundations of social life and a growing sense of dislocation and insecurity, especially among the young, in the face of wide-ranging societal changes.”

The Holy Father has often spoken about the serious negative consequences of secularization, and the consequent “dictatorship of relativism,” that dismisses God’s central role in human history and that undermines the importance of ethics in all human affairs, especially social, economic and governmental policy. In his first address to the American bishops making their *ad limina* visits, Pope Benedict made a direct connection between increasing secularization and the breakdown of the “cultural and moral foundations” that are the bedrock of human society.

What can the bishops do in response to the grave challenges facing our Church and human society as a whole? The Holy Father says the bishops must “exercise the prophetic dimension of [their] episcopal ministry by speaking out, humbly yet insistently, in defense of moral truth and offering a word of hope capable of opening minds and hearts to the truth that sets us free.”

As Pope Benedict has taught consistently throughout his pontificate, and from his earliest days as a pastor and teacher, “the truth that sets us free” is not an ideology. It is a person, Jesus Christ, the meaning of the world and of our individual lives. He alone can free us from the dictatorship of relativism and from every other form of tyranny known to humankind.

“Immersed in this [increasingly secularized] culture, believers are daily beset by the objections, the troubling questions and the cynicism of a society that seems to have lost its roots, by a world in which the love of God has grown cold in so many hearts,” the pope observes speaking to his brother bishops. “Evangelization thus appears not simply a task to be undertaken *ad extra*; we ourselves are the first to need re-evangelization.”

Bishops must first rekindle the flame of Christ’s love in their hearts. They must engage in genuine spiritual renewal. Only then can they successfully lead God’s people in the kind of “searching, critical and on-going self assessment and conversion in light of Christ’s truth” that alone can set us free. As Pope Benedict makes clear, “Only through such interior renewal will we be able to discern and meet the spiritual needs of our age with the ageless truth of the Gospel.”

The truth that sets us free is Jesus. We find Him by opening our hearts to the fire of His love and by allowing His Gospel to govern our lives and to shape social, economic and political structures.

Let us be good stewards of His truth and His love. Let us proclaim Him boldly and unapologetically in the New Year and always.