

Ordinary 22A - 2023

"The least compassionate people I ever knew."

Michael Slaughter in his book, *Unlearning Church*, tells about a religion editor from a local newspaper who came to his Church to interview him about a conference they were having. At the end of the interview, he asked if she went to Church. He assumed she did, since she was a religion editor. She said, "No, I am a Buddhist. I was raised in the Church," she went on, "but about ten years ago, I became interested in Buddhism because the highest value of Buddhism is the value of compassion." Michael Slaughter says her next comment made him feel as if she had put her hand in his chest and squeezed his heart.

"The people I grew up around in the Church," she added, "were some of the least compassionate people I ever knew." — "Ouch," says Michael Slaughter, and then he adds, "Yet Jesus is compassion made visible." And he's right. Jesus is compassion made visible. Having Jesus' name, but not his heart is a dangerous combination. It can make us turn away people that Jesus is calling us to embrace.

Deeds Inspired by Love

Frederic Ozanam was a Frenchman whose life of only forty years ended in 1853. The France in which he lived remained torn as a result of the French Revolution in the late 1700's. The Roman Catholic Church had suffered the loss, not only of property and power, but of many lives, and its leadership had become reactionary. As a result, the Church, and even Christianity itself, was treated with distrust by the working class and with disdain by many intellectuals.

Ozanam was in his late teens when he arrived at the University of Paris to study law. He was appalled to encounter there an atmosphere of bitter hostility to the Christian faith. With a number of his fellow students, he formed a study circle in order to present a positive intellectual witness to their faith. The group engaged in many debates and public controversies on behalf of Christianity. Then one day, a student threw at Ozanam this derisive challenge: "You Christians are fine at arguing, but what do you ever do?"

It was in that moment that young Frederic Ozanam was struck by a basic insight: Christianity is not about ideas, but about deeds inspired by love. His fine arguments were useless unless they were validated by how he lived his life. He resolved to start a fellowship of Christian lay people who would immerse themselves in the world of the poor and perform acts of service at personal sacrifice. This fellowship became the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

In making this commitment, Frederic Ozanam died to himself. He picked up his cross, and followed after Jesus. (by Charles Hoffacker from *An Invitation to Die*)

"My God, I could have bought back two more people with this ring:"

There is a powerful scene in the movie *Schindler's List*. In the beginning of the story, a Czech businessman named Oskar Schindler builds a factory in occupied Poland using Jewish labor because, in those tragic days at the start of World War II, Jewish labor was cheap. As the war progresses, however, and he learns what is happening to the Jews under Adolph Hitler, Schindler's motivations switch from profit to sympathy. He uses his factory as a refuge for Jews to protect them from the Nazis. As a result of his efforts, more than 1,100 Jews were saved from death in the gas chambers.

You would think that Oskar Schindler would have felt quite pleased with himself, but at the end of the war Schindler stands in the midst of some of the Jews he has saved, breaks down in tears, takes off his gold ring and says, "My God, I could have bought back two more people [with this ring]. These shoes? One more person. My coat? Two more people. These cufflinks? Three more people." There he stands, not gloating but weeping with regret that he has not done more.

I wonder if one day you and I, as followers of Christ, will ask ourselves, "Could I have done more? Have I truly borne the cross of Christ?" That is the first question on today's test: Is our Faith sacrificial? Is it costing us something?

"Take up your cross and follow me."

A certain lady who spent her time working for the Lord - visiting the sick and the bed-ridden, helping the elderly and the handicapped - was diagnosed with a knee-problem needing surgery. The surgery unfortunately, was not a success, and the woman was left in constant pain, unable to walk. It seemed that the Lord had ignored the prayers of this woman and her friends for a successful surgery. This was a woman who considered herself a personal friend of Jesus. She was utterly disappointed, and her cheerful disposition turned into sadness and gloom. One day she pulled herself together and shared with her confessor what was going on in her soul. The confessor suggested that she go into prayer and ask her Friend Jesus why he had treated her this way. And she did. The following day the priest met her and saw peace written all over her face in spite of her pain. "Do you know what Jesus said to me?" she began, "As I was looking at the crucified Jesus and telling him about my bad knee, he said to me, '**Mine is worse.**'" (Fr. Lakra).