REBUILDING OUR CHURCH

Last week Karen and I had a date night at the movies. We went to see Paranoia, a espionage thriller about a millennial named Adam, who sheds his Brooklyn “bridge-and-tunnel guy” image to leap above his entry-level job at a global tech firm. I don’t think it’s coincidence that this character’s name is Adam, for he is both seduced by a thirst for power and trapped in a manipulative game.

You see Adam quickly becomes involved in a deep web of corporate espionage. By the time he realizes this, he knows way too much and placed not only his life but also the lives of his father and friends in mortal danger. “Emma”, he tells his girl friend, “I’m going to make this right.”

Emma’s response? “You don’t know what’s right.”

Adam’s lack or disregard of an ethical compass coupled with a false self and an unbridled ambition have created a recipe of disaster. Sadly, this absence of an ethical compass coupled with a false self has many millennials and Gen Xers on paths of unhappiness and even self-destruction. They have so little understanding of the soul beating inside their bodies. Consequently, never-ending waves of technological achievements we call “advances” – or is it noise – is silencing their souls.

All of us in one way or another are also in danger not due to religious persecution but to a unpreparedness in handling the demands of our technological world. It’s a good thing Google gave us their calendar app to schedule Mass times, bible study classes, and works of charity and service. The problems begin when it ends there, blocking out times for Christ, unconsciously thinking that we’ve got our salvation covered. Msgr. Clay reminded us recently that our faith is that lifelong journey with Christ to eternal life.

I’m concerned for the youth gathered here. Some are already unconsciously caught up in the corporate games of rapid Internet connections and instant relationships. But where ever you are on your life journey, I have no doubt that you’re tightly holding fast to your search for meaning and truth, a wanting to be heard, to be understood, and to be brought to life.
Beginning two weeks from now, our Neu Waves Youth Ministry Team kicks off a 3-year mission-oriented focus, a focus that invites our youth to active participation in the life and work of the Catholic faith community. This will not be another school-like program or textbook-led curriculum. This will be an exciting year of weekly programs and activities specially chosen for our 7th graders and up. Now rest assured, there will be a catechesis component... and 7 other components, like justice and service, community life, and leadership development. In concert with the vision of our U.S. Bishops, the Neu Waves Youth Ministry is a comprehensive approach for meeting the needs and struggles of our youth where they are.

We heard this need proclaimed by Isaiah in our 1st reading. The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem had left the city and its temple in ruins. Worst of all, idol worship had replaced Yahweh, the one and only God. Exiled Israelites returning to Jerusalem had to commit themselves to a lifetime of rebuilding their lives and their temple. And so the prophet Isaiah encouraged them with visions of what a rebuilt Jerusalem could be... better and more amazing than their wildest dreams. If they’d only take the time and effort.

We also heard this theme proclaimed by Pope Francis in Brazil at World Youth Day. There he urged the youth to become religious disciples and reinvigorate the church. “Jesus is calling you to be a disciple with a mission!” he said. “Now you must go... now you must pass on this experience to others.”

**Our pope reminds us that faith takes on ownership - becomes a part of our very being - when it is experienced.**

And so it is that our Neu Waves Youth Ministry Team is calling out to all youth to be disciples with a mission. Disciples who can courageously and confidently answer those tough questions about our faith. Disciples who can make decisions that are free of corruption, greed, and selfishness. Disciples who freely identify with Jesus and share His feelings, His thoughts, and His actions.

Our Neu Waves Youth Ministry Team have gathered regularly since February to prepare for entering into conversation and even the dark nights with our youth. We are truly blessed by these dedicated disciples of Christ.

But our Youth Ministry Team can’t do this alone. Your youth need the help of all parents and grandparents, godparents and friends – the entire St. John Neumann community. Are you ready and willing to help our youth get through that narrow door? Will you pray for them unceasingly? Will you volunteer your time and talents to get to know them better? Will you encourage our youth as they confront the inequalities that persist in the world?
Together, in united Christian community, let us reflect the divine light of our church over our schools, workplaces, and social circles. Let us share the healing power of Jesus Christ and infuse deeper sense and meaning into life in the Kingdom of God.

Today and into tomorrow, our youth will be the voices heard the world over - restoring dignity to the meaning of life, silencing the idols of technology, and rebuilding our church - our church, the place where the Word of God awakens souls and brings understanding to life.

So in united Christian community let us approach this Eucharistic table, consciously and actively committed to sharing our journey together with Christ and especially our youth, no matter the cost we may encounter on the way.

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