

This Homily was written by Fr. JA Loftus S.J. for a parish on Cape Cod. I think it's worth reading, especially the Study on Young Adult Catholics.

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 28, 2018
Holy Trinity Church

There is an old saying among preachers that, "One should always preach with one hand on the Bible and the other on the daily newspaper." That's where today's homily is coming from.

In the Bible, we hear in the first reading that Moses addresses his people; he is exhausted from their bickering about him and just plain ignoring him. He says that God will raise up another Prophet to whom they will listen. That one will speak God's Word more definitively than Moses himself ever could.

Also in the Bible, today's Gospel provides more than just a hint that God's final Prophet has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. His people are "astonished" that he speaks with such authority. And the masses are so attracted to him, according to St. Mark. (All though not all are that attracted, are they?)

Here comes the daily newspaper in the other hand. Just last week a newspaper headline read: “Study asks: Why are young Catholics going, going, gone?” The new study done by St. Mary’s Press and CARA (*The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate* at Georgetown University), was released on Monday. Using some comparisons with the large PEW study on all American’s religious attitudes done in 2015, it turns out that fully 36% of young millennials (ages 18-24) are disaffiliated from the Catholic Church, and 34% of older millennials (ages 25-33) are as well. That’s more than one third of *all* young people in our church. And another startling statistic shows that an astonishing number (well over one third) of those consider themselves former Catholics. Although 35% say they are “done” with religious affiliation but still believe in something bigger, perhaps even God.

Did you notice that the word “astonishing” was used in both the Bible and the daily newspaper? Jesus’ listeners were “astonished” by his authority. The researchers were “astonished” that the number of

disaffected young Catholics was so high—higher than ever reported before. Don't you think it's astonishing that this one word is used twice? Something here is astonishing!

What did Jesus have, what authority, that none of us seem to have, or are able to pass along to our young persons? Jesus' authority was not because he claimed to be the brightest among the rabbis. He knew scripture well apparently, but was not a serious student like the Pharisees or Sadducees. It wasn't his power; he didn't have any power. But people could sense that he not only "talked the talk," he also "walked the walk." There was a genuineness and simplicity about him that was overpowering. He was always welcoming; he loved to eat and drink with just about everyone. And he loved dinner parties. The hallmark of his ministry was that he seemed able to just take people where they were. No agenda, no games, no preaching down at people. Perhaps most importantly, no one ever felt judged by Jesus. It just wasn't his style. That, oddly enough, is his real authority that they found so astonishing.

Let's return to our young folks, what was the single most important *reason* they reported for leaving the Catholic Church? While they still longed for a sense of community, "they said they too often felt judged and felt they could not ever be part of that community." Not judging other people seems to be of central importance in both the bible stories and in the newspaper story. Interesting! And maybe something to learn too.

Remember a few years ago when Pope Francis answered a question from a reporter on an airplane about gay people who were seeking God? Francis simply said, "Who am I to judge?" Speaking of "astonishing:" half the world was thrilled with his answer, the other half was horrified. Some of us faithful Catholics thought that was exactly what a Bishop was for: to judge people. Especially the Bishop of Rome, the Pope!

How do you think most young people assessed Pope Francis? How do you think Jesus would have assessed him? I can imagine Jesus thinking, "Finally someone got to the root of my so-called authority!"

My brothers and sisters, we are now Jesus' own eyes, ears, mouth, and legs. We are the Body of Christ! The invitation is now ours—yours and mine.

Let me end with a prayer written by St Teresa of Avila.

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on the world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, and you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Dis-affection and dis-affiliation is rampant in our church, and in our country, and throughout our world. The invitation is ours. Peace!