

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

An Intentional Commitment to Witness Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time/C
October 2, 2016 12:30 PM Heb 1:2-3; 2:2-4; **2 Tm 1:6-8, 13-14;** Lk 17:5-10
(In a community we need the reassurance of the goodness of life.)

“Fan into flame the gift you received.”

The second reading in today’s liturgy is from the Second Letter to Timothy, authored by St. Paul or probably one of his disciples. It is giving us a very important recommendation that **we have to become proactive in regard to our own adult faith. “Fan into flame” is implying that there is a certain sort of ember within our hearts of a formerly more devout and energetic life.**

Now let’s study that for a minute. Timothy was an adult when he converted to Christ, so in his own adult memory he could think back to when he was perhaps closer to the moment of conversion and perhaps more filled with the Holy Spirit. But most of us have been baptized as children, so our initial relation with God was as children. And actually, **yes, children have experiences of God.** The unfortunate thing is **as we grow older**, not only do we forget about what happens, but we also dismiss as unreal things that were unusually beautiful or if I daresay magical. So we dismiss Peter Pan and we dismiss Santa and often **we dismiss God’s work in our lives when we were children.** And this is actually sad. So many trudge through life with the feeling that something is missing. Well, that’s true; **something is missing, a vibrant, real, living relationship with God in the Holy Spirit.** Yes, that’s missing for a lot of us. And this is probably what is the root of the phenomenon we call **consumerism. People are trying to fill a void** with things or with a career or with their achievements or with success or something else.

So our evangelist is recommending a different tack. Fan the flame with the embers of your own early experience of God. Jesus said, “Unless you turn and become like children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” And there is a real irony here: **for us to grow an adult faith we have to turn and become like children, meaning we have to become open as we were as children.** As adults we are not usually too open. We don’t believe in fantasies and magic. But God is not a fantasy or magic. God is ineffable beauty, and **God wants to grace our awareness with his many gifts.**

Now adults do add something to the mix. Children can experience God, but children do not experience God intentionally and they are not capable of forming an intentional commitment. **That is for adults: an intentional commitment to witness to the truth of the gospels.** And

that is also what this letter is about because ordinarily in our world because of the way the world is, to be witness to the gospel causes the witness pain, discomfort, trouble, sorrow, suffering. This letter is saying look, **you have to be willing to share in this suffering, in this cross, the burden of witnessing.**

Now one of the flash points in our society, where the gospel and its values clash with the society we are living in and its values, is concerning life itself. In our society very often life like everything else is measured and commodified. But that is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is not the teachings of Christ. **Life is a gift, but we have to admit it can be a great burden.** But even when it's a burden, it's still a gift. It doesn't lose its giftedness. However, **illness and pain and depression can create enormous fear in people.** And fear creates doubt about the goodness of God, about the goodness of life; and even it throws doubt on one's desire to live. **Unplanned pregnancies** can do this as well, as can **old age and of course the onset of many debilitating illnesses.**

From the standpoint of the gospel of life **all of these are challenges; they are temptations; they are opportunities that can become a threshold into a new sense of God, or since temptations go either way, they can thrust us into very deep darkness.** In these moments **we need the reassurance of the goodness of life.** Reassurance comes through many different ways, each one a work of mercy. **Listening, encouraging, and befriending those who suffer are works of mercy.** They are ways of evangelizing because **evangelizing is about sharing the goodness of God. In a community—in a community—we take turns needing and being needed.** Sometimes we are the ones who need; other times we are called on to supply other people's need. This is what makes a community a community. **We are not designed to get through life alone.** One of the great illusions of modern society is we are supposed to be self-sufficient. Well, no, we are not supposed to be. We are not created to be. That's just someone's idea. Each of us can do some good in the world as individuals, but all of us together can do tremendous good when we act as a community, when we identify ourselves as members of a community. **Fanning the embers of our faith by supporting others in their suffering and doubt is a wonderful recipe for renewal of our own faith,** the life of our parish community, the life of the Church universal, and for that matter the life of society itself.