

RENEWAL, “the act or process of making changes to something in order to improve it so that it becomes more successful.” RENEWAL, “a situation in which something begins again after having stopped for a period of time.” Whichever way we view those two definitions of “RENEWAL”, we cannot escape the fact that “RENEWAL” will always involve us expending energy, either physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually. In the case of the type of “RENEWAL”, as asked for as a prerequisite in The Vision Document, and because it is inextricably linked to “RESTRUCTURING”, it will inevitably be the cause of making efforts in all four of those areas.

In the *natural* order of things we are, all of us, inclined to take the easier way through life; the longer we have been exercising a well tried, established practice, the less inclined we are to make the effort in changes which are necessary when circumstances change; and the older we are, with the inherent weaker physical, emotional and mental constitution, the more apprehensive and reluctant we become in desiring to expend the energy involved with “RENEWAL”. However, through our Baptism, we no longer belong to the *natural* order, but to the *supernatural* order. When the priest or Deacon poured the waters of Baptism over our heads and said, “(John/Mary) I Baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the *supernatural* life of The Trinity flowed into us. Of course, our bodies and our minds are still limited and subject to the *natural* order and will one day return to the dust of the earth from which they originated, but through the new life of The Trinity, received through Baptism, we have become a new creation. Yes, physically, emotionally and mentally we do become more and more tired the longer we live and life itself can become more of an effort - even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through His exhausted humanity, fell several times on the way to Calvary - but spirituality we ought to be becoming stronger, fitter, more energetic, indeed, becoming younger every day! Remembering that only to children does the Kingdom of God belong, becoming spiritually younger is essential if we want to get into heaven.

Jesus once said, when accused of breaking the Sabbath Day laws by curing someone, “My Father goes on working, and so do I”. The Trinity, in whose name we were Baptised and whose life we now share, is in constant activity, the activity of Divine Love, the Father loving the Son from all eternity and for the rest of eternity, the Son reciprocating equally in His love for the Father, and their love is so dynamic that proceeding from it is the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who is Their love, Personified. We, too, then, through Baptism, are caught up in the dynamism of The Three Persons, the everlasting activity of Divine love.

Now, from all eternity each one of us has been in the mind of God and so loved by Him, but at the very first moment of conception, when our Heavenly Father fused an immortal soul into the body which our parents gave us, He has looked upon a person that He has created, with His eyes so full of love that He just cannot stop gazing at us, so beautiful, so wonderful, so precious are we in His sight. The Uncreated Almighty, who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite in all perfection is enamoured by us, weak, puny, dependent, finite, sinful creatures because He sees so clearly in each

one of us the image and likeness of Himself! That spark of Divinity in us is sufficient for The Three Persons to not only want to love us but to desire to incorporate us, take us body and soul, into their life of Divine Love, an awesome reminder to us of how special we are, for only God will satisfy God, The Trinity has no need or desire for anything outside of themselves. And even though He sees us making mistakes, taking wrong turnings in life, sees us when we trip and fall into temptation, when we sin, sees us even when we turn our back on Him, His gaze of love never changes, He never looks away.

This inexplicable and mysterious love of The Three Persons of the Trinity for us caused them to stoop down from heaven, sending the Second Person, the Son of God to become truly one of us in all things except sin; taking on, in His humanity, our *natural* order with all its limitations and yet not diminishing His Divinity. Jesus Christ, the Son of God now also became the Son of Mary and He came down from heaven as the long promised Bridegroom to invite us to the everlasting Wedding Feast prepared and waiting for us in heaven, not as His guest, but as His Bride! In His miracles, always worked for the good of others, in His words of truth, consolation, encouragement, justice, forgiveness and above all by the action of the loving sacrifice of Himself on the Cross, Jesus was asking the question to all those who saw and heard Him, “Do you love Me and do you want to spend the rest of eternity with Me, in heaven?” Surely only the coldest, most tightly closed, and hardened heart could fail to respond and turn down that invitation; and yet, sadly, many did just that, even in the time of Our Lord, and still do today.

But this Divine Lover of ours never gives up wooing us in this crucial time of courtship which we are now living out here on earth. By His rising from the dead, body and soul, on that first Easter Sunday, Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom, still with the marks of His passionate love for us on His body, continues His calling to us. That two-part question, “Do you love Me and do you want to spend the rest of eternity with Me, in heaven?” is still put to all of us many times, every day of our lives, and will be until we take our last breath, after which we can make no more choices. This invitation of Our Lord is whispered to our hearts in all the varied situations we encounter as we walk along this path of life, but especially so when we are in danger of not loving Him with all our mind, heart, body and soul and not loving our neighbour as He has shown us how to love them. In other words, during times of temptation Christ is going to say to us, perhaps even more urgently, “Do you love Me and do you want to spend the rest of eternity with Me in heaven, or, do you love this action or inaction, these words or this silence, do you love this person or yourself for a short-lived, empty pleasure, more than your God who has died for you and has won and prepared the unimaginable joys of heaven awaiting you for the rest of eternity, do you really want to risk losing all of that?”

Because Almighty God has created out of love in order to love us, He can only invite us to respond to this love of His and ask us to share that love with others; true love by its very nature has to be given, received and responded to in total freedom, it has to be

a conscious, free act of the will. Almighty God does not, cannot, force us to love Him; we who are utterly dependent on Him for our very existence, for every heartbeat, for every breath we take, have been given, by Him, the awesome, “frightening” power of being able to say NO to God, to reject His love and to decide to opt for something or someone whose inferiority cannot be compared to the One on whom we turn our backs.

During the forty years that God’s chosen people were wandering in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, He put them to the test many times, not to catch them out or “trip them up” but to draw out and strengthen their love for Him. How easy it is to love when things are going well, when all our plans are being fulfilled, when the other person is acting in a way which makes it attractive to love them, but true love can only be tested in adversity, in difficult times, in disappointment, pain, sadness, failure, bereavement, when another people are showing that they are less than perfect! The Old Testament people would not have referred to experiencing the limitations of this life as carrying crosses, but we, as followers of Jesus Christ, do, because on His Cross He showed how to turn the poverty of adversities into treasures, and by His Resurrection has shown us that even death has now become a priceless treasure which enables us to enter heaven. We, like the Israelites, are in the wilderness of this life on our way to the Promised Land and God is still trying to draw out and strengthen our love for Him and our neighbour through the crosses of this less than perfect life. In the *natural* order we might grumble and moan, we might be fearful and anxious for the future, but if we are continually RENEWING our *supernatural* order, by deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ through the Mass, the Sacraments, prayer and good works, even though we may not understand now the reason for crosses, nevertheless we shall view and indeed welcome crosses as golden opportunities to attain true and lasting happiness - they are invitations from Almighty God to love Him more. Why? Well, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux will help us here: *“Of all the movements, sensations and feelings of the soul, love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator and make some sort of similar return however unequal though it be. For when God loves, all He desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of His love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love Him are made happy by their love of Him.”*

Yes, the kind of “RENEWAL” asked for in The Vision Document, an absolute prerequisite for “RESTRUCTURING”, will involve all of us, priests and people, expending physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy, but such activity is inherent to the true disciple of Jesus Christ. What were the first and last words spoken by Our Lord to His disciples? They were, “COME” and “GO”. “Come and see” (where I live), “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.” And what happens at every Mass wherever or whenever it is celebrated? We engage in activity, we make the effort to “COME”; we come to meet Jesus Christ, we come to participate in the actual events of His Passion, Death and Resurrection, we come to receive Him, His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity through the Eucharist, into the very depths of our being, so that His life may animate ours, that He may enable us to live and to love as He does. And what happens at the end of every Mass? The priest, in the person of Jesus Christ, tells us to, “GO”, “*Ite, missa est*”, “Go forth, the Mass is ended”, engage in the

activity of discipleship, make the effort, take the risk, enjoy the reward of telling everyone about Jesus Christ, who is the Good News Himself.

*“Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall RENEW the face of the earth.”*

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