



And They Will Know We Are Christians.... How We Respond to the Moral Questions of Our Time

Recent events have led to a growing fear amongst Christians about the world we live in. Recently, both in the Maronite and Roman Catholic Churches, we heard the Gospel about the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28). Jesus crossed over to foreign lands inhabited by pagans. Amongst those pagans he found the Canaanite Woman. She was bold and confident in her faith, yet remained humble. Her faith was strong even in the face of rejection.

Many of us have sung the words of the hymn “and they will know we are Christians by our love.” Those words are more important now than ever. We need not fear the secular world and the things happening in it. We don’t need to react to things as if they are signs of the end of the world. Everything is an opportunity to bring Christ into the midst and we need to go out to those who do not know God and seize the opportunity to take the message of Christ to the world. Like the Apostles we might be surprised by the faith we find in it.

We as a Church don’t need to be panicked and reactive. We need to be proactive. The Church thrives in times when it has been counter-cultural. So, what can we do to bring Christ’s message to the world?

Calm down

The Church is not going to be attractive if the people in it are morally outraged, full of self-righteousness, judgemental, fearful and closed up on themselves. We must resist anger and the language of moral decline. As Pope Francis repeatedly tells us, the joy of the Gospel is for everyone and no one is excluded.

Do not expect others to behave like you or have Christian values

What is the point of saying to someone who does not share your Christian views – Doesn’t anyone believe in marriage anymore?

The truth is many people don’t believe in Christian marriage and they have not done so in a long time.

Our actions are in the spotlight right now, including how we speak and how we treat people. It is our actions which will inspire others to Christianity, not our judgement. As the hymn tells us, “they will know we are Christians by our love”. Jesus healed the pagan woman, but he repeatedly spoke out against religious people acting hypocritically. Judgement and condemnation of people is not going to bring people to the Church car park, let alone past the Church doors.

Do not be afraid to be friends with people who don’t hold your values

Jesus was not afraid to mix in foreign lands. To be friends with non-Christians will require sincerity and love. You can’t be constantly yelling at your non-Christian friends that what they are doing is wrong or patronising them for their values. It is good to pray for people, but to tell them that you are doing it because they are sinners is patronising. Pray for them in love. You can do it without condemning them. It



is also condescending to tell someone “we love the sinner, but not the sin”. We are all sinners, telling someone they are a sinner but you love them really is not a good start to any conversation.

People are only going to be attracted to something that they see is working. They need to be inspired by the way you live your life in Christ. If you are living your own life as a true Christian and you are loving both your neighbour and strangers, people are going to be attracted to that.

You don't need to win the argument

This is one that many of us are bad at. The need to win the argument in the short-term can lead to us actually losing it in the long run. A discussion that descends into argument, debate and personal attacks will not bring anyone to Christ. Listening to and understanding the other persons view, even if you don't agree with it, is the key to unlocking what it is you need to say to that person in that moment. There are times when it is actually prudent to say nothing. The need to have the last word in this moment may cause hurt and drive people away forever. Think beyond the need to win.

Scripts do not work. How you speak to each person needs to be personal. Share your own stories. Tell them what you do and why. None of us are perfect. Listening to people who have a different view might lead to you improving yourself.

Be careful about using slippery slope arguments ‘because of A, then B, C, and D will happen’. God transforms in love, not in fear.

The Church being Christ in Society

The Church also needs to be careful how it reacts to the moral issues of the time.

The brilliant theologian Metropolitan Anthony Bloom once said something about the Church that is quite radical. It is counter intuitive to how many think the Church should conduct herself in society.

“It seems to me, and I am personally convinced, that the Church must never speak from a position of strength. [These are shocking words.] It ought not to be one of the forces influencing this or that state. The Church ought to be, if you will, just as powerless as God himself, which does not coerce but which calls and unveils the beauty and the truth of things without imposing them. As soon as the Church begins to exercise power, it loses its most profound characteristic which is divine love [i.e.] the understanding of those it is called to save and not to smash...”

From the beginning the central message to Adam and Eve was that God in his divine glory had given them choice. He gives us the choice to choose Him. A key reason as to why so many did not believe Jesus was the Messiah was that they expected someone who would come and overthrow the present kingdom, the government of the time. Jesus consistently taught that his Kingdom was not the kingdom of this world. He resisted temptation in the wilderness when Satan showed him all the kingdoms of earth and offered them to him to rule. Jesus did not come with armies or rule by forcing his views, morals and doctrines on anyone.



Christ's way has also been the cornerstone of Pope Francis' papacy, he has called us to be careful of turning the faith into an ideology:

"The faith passes, so to speak, through a distiller and becomes ideology. And ideology does not beckon [people]. In ideologies there is not Jesus: in his tenderness, his love, his meekness. And ideologies are rigid, always. Of every sign: rigid. And when a Christian becomes a disciple of the ideology, he has lost the faith: he is no longer a disciple of Jesus, he is a disciple of this attitude of thought... For this reason Jesus said to them: 'You have taken away the key of knowledge.' The knowledge of Jesus is transformed into an ideological and also moralistic knowledge, because these close the door with many requirements."

So let us all be disciples of Christ.

My top 4 tips:

1. Talk about what you do and what you believe, do not tell others what they should do and believe.
2. If you are speaking about Christ, start by speaking about who Christ is and that he came for all of our salvation. He came to heal, forgive and free us. Don't start by telling people Christ came to condemn them.
3. Each person is different and you need to meet the person where they are and choose your words carefully. You want to prompt people's consciences and what will work for one will not work for others. Pray and be prepared to listen and allow the Spirit to work through you to properly discern the right time to speak and the right words to say.
4. Let them know you are Christian by your Love

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