

PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE – EASTER - *'What Kind of Church?'*

1 / 2 May 2010

Dear Friends

As we approach Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church, our Church is in crisis. Sexual abuse and inaction by some in leadership over the years have tarnished the Church and compromised the Message of Jesus. Recently, Pope Benedict celebrated his fifth anniversary as Pope but it was clear that he felt very burdened by the Church's 'wounds and sins'.

What kind of Church? is an important question because we need a clear answer. The Church is not a sect or a club, nor is it the Church of the 'revolving door' where people come and go as they please. We are the Church and like a family we need to be here for the long haul. I share with you St Augustine's wise words from his Sermon on 1 John 6, 6:

Who am I? What are you? You and I are nothing but the Church... If God wills, we belong to his Church. But it is by love that we belong to the Church. And we must persevere to stay with the Church if we wish to show the love we have.

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, a leading Catholic thinker, in a recent article in The Tablet (10 April 2010), asked the question, *'Should I stay or should I go?'* In fact, we are free to 'leave the Church' if we so wish. Jesus even gave that freedom to his disciples, *'What about you? Do you want to go away too?'* Yet this is hardly Jesus' wish for us.

Though difficult, what ultimately matters is the truth. If what is true is the sinfulness of those who have offended or the failure of bishops to act correctly, then so be it. Our Church can only survive when we face the truth, however painful. As with so many events in our lives, we cannot take things back to the way they were. We cannot bring a loved one back to life, nor can we restore lost innocence to a child or adult who has been abused.

In one sense, the media has done us a favour by its insistence that the Church face its failures. The shame of abuse must be addressed, victims looked after, and their right to justice respected. Achieving this in our society is fraught with tension as spin and propaganda often masquerade as truth and reputations can be destroyed without a thought. Fr Radcliffe points out the complications, *'Confidentiality is also a consequence of the Church's insistence on the right of everyone accused to keep their good name until they are proven to be guilty.'*

'Should I stay or should I go?' Personally, I've never thought of going because I love the Church. Fr Radcliffe makes some interesting observations here. If we leave the Church, will we find a safer haven? I doubt it. Surely it is preferable to stay and work to make our Church more transparent. Fr Radcliffe does not excuse the mistakes of the Church but affirms his belief that the

Church, *'embodies something which is essential to the Christian witness to the Resurrection, visible unity.'*

Didn't the early Christian community gather in its numbers the 'cowards and deniers'? He concludes, *'...throughout history, Peter has often been a wobbly rock, a source of scandal, corrupt, and yet this is the one – and his successors – whose task it is to hold us together so that we may witness to Christ's defeat on Easter Day of sin's power to divide.'*

The Church is stuck with me! What about you?

Fr Dave