

There is an old Chinese curse. It says; "May you live in interesting times." We are living in times that are way too interesting! The so-called economic recovery isn't a recovery; the title is more like children whistling as they pass a graveyard at night. The vaulted healthcare system is collapsing under its own weight. The guarantee of being able to kill our children into the 3rd trimester earns standing ovations at political rallies. Terrorism, and riots disrupt our cities. Natural events have been brutal the last 5 years with droughts, fires and floods abounding. We have just suffered 2, 100 year storm events as far as rainfall is concerned in 10 days here in Hope Mills and now there is a typhoon heading up the west coast.

As we look around it is way too easy to get discouraged, too easy to give in to the prevailing attitudes, to assume that just because something is legal, that it is also moral. Too easy to be intimidated by our PC culture that works hard to squash any mention of God or God's law anywhere outside these 4 walls of the Church. A culture that suppresses free debate and opinions that would cause a person to question the accepted norm.

In such an environment, what are we to do? How do we live while maintaining our Christian dignity and how do we carry out the apostolic command, "Go and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit"? How can we turn our nation and ourselves from this culture of death back to the culture of life?

The answer is as simple as it is difficult. It isn't flashy, it doesn't require huge amounts of cash, and it doesn't require advertizing on television and social media. It does require us, the people of God to be disciplined and courageous. It requires inconvenience, and for us to speaking gently, yet firmly with people, and a willingness to take the extra step to help our neighbor.

The answer is prayer and evangelization. This steady slide toward the destruction of our society won't turn around until we have more people inside the Church than we have outside the Church. Being inside the Church isn't just showing up for Mass on Sunday, some of the most notorious public sinners of our age claim to do that much. Being inside the Church means living our Catholic faith in every aspect of our lives.

The answer starts so simply with prayer. This is something that everyone can accomplish. Look at the widow in today's Gospel. In Jewish society at

that time, the term 'widow' was defined as 'one who has no voice'. In other words, a non-person, someone beneath the attention of ordinary people, someone who had no voice in public debate or in a court of law. Yet she prevails. She prevails because she just flat refuses to quit. Ceaseless prayer is critical when crying out to God for justice.

Moses holds his arms out over the battle in prayer for victory and the preservation of God's chosen people. Whenever his hands were up, or stated in a different fashion, whenever he persevered in prayer, the Israelites would win, but when his prayers faltered, the enemy forces would gain the upper hand. We don't know if he asked for help, or his companions noticed that he needed help, both are legitimate points of view, his companions moved to assist him in his prayer, sharing the burden and winning the day for Israel. Prayer in community, and praying for other people is an essential part of everyone's prayer life.

Paul encourages Timothy to delve deeply into scripture, we are required to do the same and to also dig into the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the other documents promulgated by the Magisterium because at the end of John's Gospel, he tells us that there is more than what is written here. In order to evangelize, we must believe. In order to believe, we must have a basic understanding of what it is that we profess to believe in.

The scriptures aren't just a history lesson. They apply to each and every one of us every day. Simon Peter's declaration of faith in his answer to Jesus when asked; "who do you say that I am?" Belongs to us as well. We must also acknowledge that he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God every day, every time we pray. If we don't, then to whom are we praying, and where are we asking for intercession from?

Then Paul gives Timothy, and us a charge. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching."

Today this charge tells us to get outside and play. Pope Francis has called us to get messy and foolish, to actively engage in conversation about our faith, even when it isn't comfortable or convenient; even when we are rejected.

Where is the foundation, where do we get the strength, the endurance for the task that has been put in front of us? The spiritual grounding for all of this is the quest for justice. Not justice in the sense of American jurisprudence, but justice as God sees it, justice in the sense of giving people what they deserve as children of God. Remember that the widow cried out to the unjust judge for justice. God infuses the hearts of those who pray for justice with justice and then empowers them into the affairs of the world.

Where do you get the endurance? Where do Fr. Gaul and I get the endurance to do what we do? We get it from the grace we receive from praying. The more we pray, particularly when we pray for justice, the more we are able to pray and the more we are able to accomplish.

It works the same for every body. The more you pray, the more energy you have for prayer. The more you share your faith, the more energy you have for sharing your faith. It doesn't make any sense, until you remember that God delights in confounding the false wisdom of the mighty by using the simplicity of the lowly. Keep in mind that through prayer we are deliberately putting ourselves in the way of God's love, and with the experience of that love, we can do anything.

Take heart, have courage. With God's help we can turn this mess around. We just need to have the discipline to pray and the courage to act upon the graces that come from those prayers. We just have to get a little messy and foolish with our well-ordered lives. Only in this way will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he returns.