Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt 5:17).

1 Kgs 18:20-39; *Mt 5:17-19*

Some believers describe themselves as traditionalists and some as progressives. A living faith requires both tradition and the wisdom to apply it to changing

circumstances.

One of the greatest controversies facing the emerging church in the first century was between those who insisted on continuity with the past and those who saw the need to identify the essentials and carry them forward into an uncertain future.

St. Paul and other missionaries taking the Gospel into the Gentile world were fiercely opposed by so-called Judaizers who insisted that new converts had to become Jews before they could be Christians. The Council of Jerusalem resolved this crisis by recognizing the Holy Spirit at work in the expansion of the Jesus movement into the Gentile world. Something new was happening, and tradition was being fulfilled in new initiatives and daring adaptations.

In today's Gospel, Jesus rejects criticism that he was a lawbreaker and heretic by saying that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. This was certainly the position of the early church. St. Paul warned his churches not to find false security in keeping the letter of the law without being open to its spirit.

Traditionalists who are also literalists think they are preserving the faith by etching it in stone or by codifying it in the words of a catechism that cannot be questioned or even interpreted. New problems are a threat to be ignored rather than challenges to be met. A closed mind seems safer than an open one, but it stifles growth and reduces faith to fear of making mistakes by taking risks.

Pope Francis, who has faced open criticism and organized subversion from his critics in the church, recently reclaimed the idea of tradition as valid only if it understood as "handing on" a living faith, not as guarding the ashes of the past.

Though his reforms have been too much for some and too little for others, the pope has moved the church forward in astonishing ways in the past nine years because he trusts the Holy Spirit to both preserve and create anew the mystery of Christ as a transforming force for change animated by love.

We fulfill our call to discipleship only if we keep growing. We must be grounded in our faith, but only so we can take flight on the wings of the Spirit when Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Come, follow me."

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