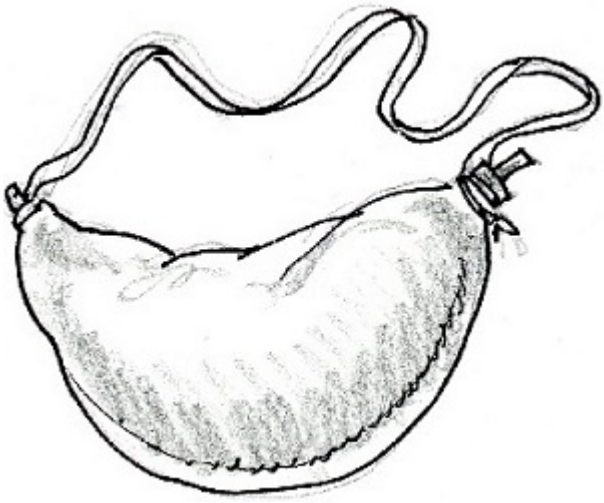
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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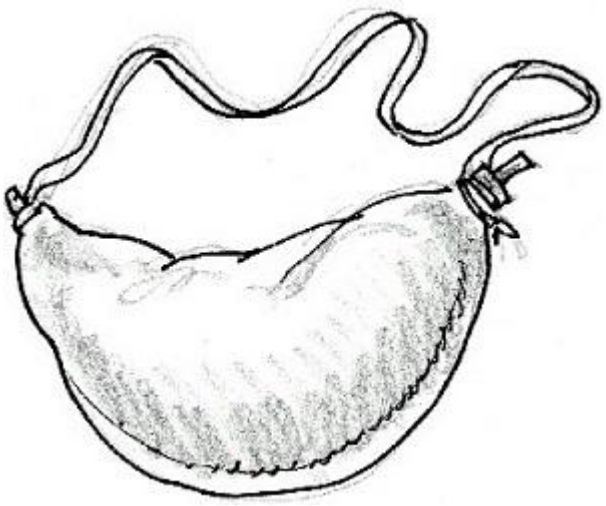

“New wine must be poured into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:39).

1 Cor 4:1-5; Luke 5:33-39

One of the conservative arguments against change in the church goes like this: Because the Spirit is guiding the church, it has always been perfect, and therefore change can only be an extension of what already is. This argument is called the “hermeneutics of continuity” in contrast with progressive claims that real changes are needed, dubbed by critics as the “hermeneutics of rupture.”

In today’s first reading, St Paul was always facing resistance from traditionalists about moving too quickly into the freedom of grace offered by the love of God revealed in Jesus. For Paul, faith in Jesus’ saving death and glorious resurrection had superseded the security of the law. Paul rejected the idea that continuity with Jewish rules and practices required that converts become Jews before they could be Christians.

This same way of thinking was used to slow the renewal of the church after the Second Vatican Council and to protect the status quo. There is some truth in it, since the tradition and doctrinal core do not change, but they must also be recovered, rearticulated and applied to the needs of successive eras and cultures to be relevant.

Jesus’ parables of the new patch on old cloth and new wine in fresh wineskins seem to support the need for institutional change as new approaches and energies are poured into the life of the church. Pope Francis, like his model and predecessor Pope John XXIII, has not made any basic doctrinal changes, but both popes have clearly

challenged the church to adjust pastorally to meet a changing world and to accommodate a new effervescent and dynamic approach as the breath of the Holy Spirit.

We as individual believers face this same challenge as we grow in our faith and go through life stages. An adult Catholic cannot have the faith of a child or adolescent. Discernment replaces rote obedience. Old ways are comforting and familiar, but they must be adjusted as adult challenges arise. Change is a fact of life, and those who refuse to change fall behind (or fall apart) when the world moves on without them.

Jesus describes the new life he offered as an invitation to a wedding, a celebration of God’s infinite love flowing into our small, cautious worlds. The crisis we face is a crisis of joy, like falling in love. An ever-expanding heart and new garments are needed to take part in this newness. We are brought to the threshold of change, inside and out.

We can refuse to go forward and become defensive and resistant, or we can pray for insight and courage, then surrender to the grace of the moment being offered. God is always now; God is always in the next step, the invitation to grow. Isn’t this the Good News?

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