RUMBLINGS FROM THE BUNKER

THE TEAR IN THE CHURCH

Perhaps it coincides with the arrival in a new parish but it seems some have a fascination with labels. In particular the desire to label people. On no less than five occasions this past week I was asked either directly or subtly as to whether I am a liberal or a conservative. Now I find this a trifle amusing but it has dawned on me that there is a much more serious side to this apparently harmless chit chat.

Of course it's not the first time I have been asked this. I always struggle with how to answer. I mean if you mention a specific issue I can usually offer some sort of opinion or response to that issue. Say for example Mass in Latin or receiving Holy Communion on the tongue or the ongoing apparitions in Medjugore, these are quite specific and it is relatively easy to proffer a personal comment on them. However it is a different matter to summarise oneself, indeed one's ministry, in a word, a label. If I am honest I think part of my resisting succumbing to a label is that it is so boring, so dead, so lacking in imagination. I guess I am hoping there might be a little bit more to me. I cling to the hope that I might be a tad more interesting than the cul de sac of label might suggest.

Anyways enough of all that introspective drivel, the point I am trying to make is that our fixation with the label especially when it comes to church and faith matters is actually toxic. We are buying into a media type soundbite that causes and indeed perpetuates division. Are you liberal or conservative? Are you traditional or progressive? Who cares? I am far more interested in do you know Jesus, or at least have you tuned into the exciting adventure of getting to know him? Of course the interrogation is as old as the hills! Are you for Peter? Are you for Paul? Jesus reminds us that the pagans lord it over each other and urges that it not happen amongst us. He prays for unity. Ut unum sint.

I enjoy debate. The cut and thrust of verbal jousting has it's appeal but sometimes it allows us to dodge something more exacting yet infinitely more rewarding and that is the hard graft of focusing on Jesus. So yes we can differ, have our preferences, for example I respect and sometimes pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet or similar devotions but I am increasingly drawn to contemplation and Ignatian prayer. So Father, are you liberal or conservative? Well I hope I am for the Nazarene. It seems sometimes the more debate, more noise...verbal flatulence....how about moving to a stillness of Spirit? Is it not the more we focus on Jesus the less our differences matter. Then the more we unite in the beauty of resting in Him?

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