Disciple’s Corner

What does ‘counsel the doubtful’ mean these days?

I am not sure exactly when the Works of Mercy were finally identified and written down, but I’m guessing it was a time in human history somewhat different from our own.

For many centuries, Christian philosophy and theology operated out of a “classical” view of the world. This static view of reality assumed that Creation was essentially complete and unchanging, even though we realized that there was in Salvation History a certain movement or progression toward the end-times.

The modern (and now post-modern) western world has a much more dynamic sense of creation, built upon discoveries such as the evolution of species and the constantly expanding nature of the universe.

All around us we see signs of constant change produced by the Industrial Revolution, modern technology, and emerging social and political philosophies. And we are made almost instantly aware of these changes and the impact they are having on us by modern communications.

I think living in a rapidly changing world like ours produces a different kind of doubt than our distant ancestors experienced. You might say that for them the issue was how to understand the way things are; but for us, there is also the challenge to understand the way things might become.

This isn’t to deny what the Church believes to be immutable or unchanging values, principles and truths; only to say that there is an almost unending progression of new knowledge and new situations to which we are challenged to apply these principles and values.

I think this constantly evolving sense of reality induces anxiety and fear—the twin sisters, you might say, of doubt.

Generally, we might say that faith is the remedy for doubt, but faith, as St. Paul says, is not only the conviction about how things are; it is also the assurance of things hoped for (cf. Hebrews 11.1ff).

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical on hope, said that hope is such an essential component of faith that the words for each seem almost interchangeable in Scripture. Christians have a future, Pope Benedict wrote. “It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness.”

And, the Pope pointed out, “the one who has hope lives differently.” (cf. “Spe salvi”, #1ff)

These days, I think, to “Counsel the Doubtful” means to make people aware of this hope. In fact, the greatest act of mercy may be to give someone hope, the ultimate antidote to doubt and despair.

What do you think?

Counsel the Doubtful

“The accelerated pace of history is such that one can scarcely keep abreast of it. ...(H)umankind substitutes a dynamic and more evolutionary concept of nature for a static one, and the result is an immense series of new problems calling for a new endeavor of analysis and synthesis…”

“People are becoming conscious that the forces they have unleashed are in their own hands and that it is up to them to control them or be enslaved by them…”

“The Church believes that Christ can show people the way and strengthen them through the Spirit so that they become worthy of their destiny… It also maintains that beneath all those changes there is much that is unchanging, much that has its ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

—Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. (§5; 10)

Learn More
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Pray and Reflect
Use one or more of the following questions for personal reflection, group discussion, or private journaling:
• On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) rate how much doubt you experience in your faith life. How would you rate yourself five years ago?
• Questions for Children: What can we do when we are afraid because we don’t know what’s going to happen?
• Questions for Families/Classrooms: What can we do as a family or as a community when we are afraid or anxious because we don’t know what’s going to happen?
• Questions for Adults: When or why do you experience anxiety or doubt? What have you found to be the best remedy for doubt in yourself or in others? How can we help our children, grandchildren and students to cope with anxiety, fear and doubt?
• I think the best way to help someone who is doubtful is.....

Join the Conversation
Add your comments to this week’s discussion at Facebook.com/FaithLeadersCorner/.

Dave Cushing is director of adult faith formation for the Catholic parishes in Waterloo. The Disciple’s Corner is sponsored by the Archdiocese of Dubuque’s Office of Faith Formation and Education and is funded through the Archdiocesan Educational Development Board. It is designed to help catechists, teachers, parents, grandparents, guardians and other adults grow in their appreciation of their role as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Benedictine ‘Come and See’ Weekend

CLYDE, Missouri — The Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri, will host a Come and See weekend for women discerning a religious vocation.

The event is scheduled for the evening of Friday, March 11, through noon on Sunday, March 13, 2016.

Those who would like to participate should be single Catholic women between the ages of 18 and 45. The event is free for those participating.

For more information, please contact Vocation Director Sister Ruth Elaine Stemman, OSB at (660) 944-2221 or vocation@benedictinesisters.org. Information is also available online at www.BenedictineSisters.org and click on Vocations/Come and See.

Lenten Taizé prayer at Sinsinawa

SINSINAWA, Wisconsin — Lenten Taizé Prayer will be held at Sinsinawa Mound at 7 p.m. Mondays, Feb. 15, 22, and 29 and March 7 and 14. The communal singing of these simple, meditative prayer chants will be led by Sister Mary Ellen Winston, OP. For more information, contact Guest Services at (608) 748-4411 or visit our website at www.sinsinawa.org. Sinsinawa Mound, the Motherhouse for the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, is located in southwest Wisconsin on County Road Z, off Highway 11, about five miles northeast of Dubuque.

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