

the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

Aboard St. Peter's Barque with the Catechism Charting Our Course

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Chasing Holiness

As has been said earlier, “Amen” means, “*verily, truly, so be it!*” But, there is more history here. It is one of only a handful of Hebrew words adopted unchanged into the Christian vocabulary (along with *Satan, halleluia, Pesach, Eden*, and a few others). In Hebrew, it is also an acronym for the words meaning, “G-d, the trustworthy King.” [Out of a profound sense of humility and adoration, the Jews do not place vowels when referring to God, nor utter the Holy Name aloud.]

This word, *amen*, is used 129 times in the New Testament, but only 30 times throughout the Old Testament texts. ‘Amen’

most often expresses the idea that the speaker is not just mouthing words, but saying things that he himself believes in.

In the Old Testament, ‘Amen’ was used by the speaker to signify that he agreed with the ideas of another that he was passing on, “Amen I say!” In the New Testament’s gospels, the word seems to be used solely by Jesus to punctuate his own thoughts! This is a whole new way in which the word ‘amen’ is used. This usage was powerful enough to have passed the test of time and lasted for millennia. How many words were so perfect that they have lasted unchanged over 2000 years?



Dear Fr. Thom,

I was told that ‘modernism’ was condemned by Pope Pius X. Why? Being modern sounds like a good thing...

A Modern Man

Dear Modern,

Pope Pius X did in fact condemn ‘modernism’ as the “synthesis of all heresies” in his 1907 encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici gregis* (which means, *Feeding the Lord’s Flock*). The Catholic Encyclopedia defines it as “*an exaggerated love of what is modern.*” This heresy was said to contain a range of ‘-isms’ that undercut or went to war with Christianity. Much argument has ensued over what and whose views make up ‘modernism.’ Even those accused maintained that they were not guilty of the beliefs attributed to them. But, there isn’t room here to go into detail.

It’s enough to say that all Christians are responsible, both individually and together, for resisting ideas or people claiming that we need only ourselves in life, or that Jesus was merely a wise teacher and not the Son of God. The gift and challenge of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is to always approach him as one person with two natures: “... one divine and the other human, not confused, but united in the one person of God’s Son.” (CCC 481) This truth alone should create the humility in us required to realize we need more than ourselves in life.

To paraphrase a wise teacher, if you’re using methods to study the Bible that leave you thinking you’re the creator of your life, and Jesus is not, you’ve gotten off track! Keep praying!

~Fr. Thom



SAINTS PRESERVE US!

Born Giuseppe Sarto in 1835, this boy would grow to become known as a pope with ‘conspicuous holiness.’ Giuseppe began his seminarian studies in 1850 in Padua, Italy as a result of a scholarship. Ordained in 1858, the pastor at his first assignment was said to have noted that because of his “(zeal), good sense... and other precious gifts,” one day “he will wear the miter,* of that I am sure.” *[*miter*- hat worn by bishop; see website]

He instituted a course of study of Christian doctrine in his parish, believing that one must know and understand as best they can what they believe so as to weather the storms of life that assail everyone. He was named bishop in 1884. During these times, religion was being suppressed by governments in many lands; monasteries were closed or destroyed, and religious institutions were heavily taxed. Indifference fell over the young priests and many were in error as they taught their flocks. Bishop Sarto corrected this with classes in catechism, often taught by himself with great fervor. He had great effect. He was elected Pope in 1903 and responded to this appointment with “*Fiat voluntas tua!*” (Your will be done!) and took the name Pius X.

He is remembered most for liturgical renewal and the return to frequent reception of the Eucharist, as well as his untiring battles to keep doctrine centered and rooted in Jesus Christ, the center of the faith.

It's Been Said...

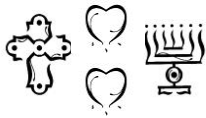
...“The Catholic Church is out of step with the times and needs to update itself.” You want to reply, “What a novel suggestion. Imagine that... for the first time in 2000 years someone thinks that the Church must reinvent herself.” O.K. Enough sarcasm. Looking at the proposal as one of good faith with no hidden agenda, let's break it into its component parts...

‘Catholic Church...’~ founded by Christ... safe assumption that the Son of God had some pretty definite ideas about the nature of his Church (see Isaiah 22:15-25).

‘Out of step with the times...’~ this charge is a tough notion to prove about an institution whose purpose is to lead people

of faith *out* of time... into eternity! Which ‘times’ are we to be in step with?

‘Needs to update itself...’~ here at least is a process to evaluate. What is there to update? 1. the language? Granted, words must be honed to grasp and convey the fullness of meaning. There are theologians and bishops in the Church who, guided by the Holy Spirit, strive to do this via writings and councils. 2. some disciplines? True, it's hardly a penance to abstain from meat on Friday with the variety of seafood now available. 3. matters of faith and morals? Now here is where agendas rear up. As we Catholics know, the essentials of our faith cannot be changed. While we must grow into deeper understanding of Christ's message, changing essential messages would be setting up our own kingdom and not protecting Christ's kingdom.



Catechetical

The Canaanite woman who reminds Jesus that “even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their master” illustrates two facets of Jesus' new kingdom. First, God's saving love is for everyone, not just for the Jews of that day and age (nor solely for the Christians in this day and age!). Second, a ‘new holiness’ is expected.

With regard to the first feature of this new kingdom, God is calling every human being. This is known as a universalist message or a theme of universalism. Be careful, though, *not* to confuse this general definition with the one used to describe the specific belief that *everyone goes to heaven*. The general definition of the word is used by the Church to describe how she sees Jesus' mission. Not only is ‘church, wherever Christ resides’ (CCC 830), but the Church is considered *catholic* (universal) because “she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race: ‘*All men are called to belong to the new People of God...*’” (CCC 831) This is a powerful new message: all people are one in God!

Second, the ‘new holiness’ pictured by this Canaanite woman is one defined by her humility and faith. At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees (meaning ‘the separated ones’) defined their holiness by staying apart from others. They believed this kept them ‘clean, pure.’ What actually happened is that they ended up becoming arrogant, holding themselves ‘above’ others and to different standards. Separation does not define holiness nor make one pure. This message is revolutionary: *all are called to holiness*, not just the few who hold themselves separate! “Christian perfection has but one limit, that of having none.” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, as found in CCC 2028)

SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...

Today's gospel hints further that the mission of Christ is not limited to the house of Israel. Besides a reference in Matthew and Mark to Simon the Apostle (not Simon-Peter) being a Canaanite, this is the only time in the New Testament that someone is directly identified as a Canaanite. The land of Canaan has always been described in a good light. The people from Canaan, though, have not been pictured so favorably. In fact, the Canaanites were ‘the enemies’ conquered by Israel in Deuteronomy 7:1-4. But, today we see Jesus giving ‘the scraps’ to Israel's enemy!

This story of this Canaanite woman is found in Matthew wedged between the two stories of the feeding of the multitudes. As has been noted, the symbolism of the root numbers in the first account (5, 12) indicates that it is a message to Israel. The root numbers in the second account (4, 7) give scholars reason to believe that it was a message to the gentiles. We see in the story of the Canaanite woman a bridge between the old and the new, and a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of the offer made to the gentiles in the second account. Those hearing the story of the second feeding would know Jesus' word was good. Because of her faith and humility, he grants this woman what she desires. He heals her daughter.

Noteworthy here as well is that this Canaanite woman asks only for ‘scraps’ from the historical conqueror. She calls Jesus the ‘Son of David,’ recognizing him to be the ‘Son of God,’ King of the New Kingdom. Pride and vengeance are set aside in the face of this anointed One. The words of today's first reading are meant for anyone and everyone with this type of new holiness: “...them I will bring to my holy mountain...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Is. 56:7)

Corner

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