

ON THE FULLNESS OF TIME

I have been thinking recently about the “fullness of time” in terms of ecclesiology. What does “fullness of time” mean? Why did it happen when it happened? Why couldn’t it have happened at any other time – for example – this year of 2007? What are the ramifications for all of us who share the planet at this particular time in history?

The “fullness of time” that is referred to both in Scripture and in the living oral Tradition of the Church, and the teaching of the Magisterium is not completely the moment of the Incarnation – when Mary gave her “fiat” and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus began to exist in her womb. Though this event was the only birth in all of human history that was pre-announced – and predicted to happen when certain prophecies had been fulfilled – the real focal point – the “moment” of the “fullness of time” was the moment that Jesus handed over his spirit and died “for us men, and for our salvation!”

Every other person in human history is born into this world to live, Jesus is the only one in the history of the world born into this world to *die!* But it was to be no ordinary death, and no ordinary life. They were both to be executed precisely according to the will of God the Father. And not only that – but with absolute and total freedom of will, filial obedience and out of extreme love for God the Father!

And so, the “fullness of time” is entirely determined by God the Father, not by Jesus, nor anyone else or any other circumstance.

It occurred, therefore, when it occurred – because God the Father wanted it to occur then! It occurred at a time in history when there was no CNN, no Internet, no Court TV, no Reality TV and no hailstorm of political correctness. It occurred at a time in history when family was all important, when religion was woven into the fabric of life, and faith in God took courage, determination and guts.

It occurred at a time when the rate of communication was slow. It occurred when there were no databanks, and record keeping was not very accurate or complete. It occurred at a time when there was extreme poverty, sickness and lack of education for nearly everyone.

It occurred at a time, and in the particular location that it did, because the excessive brutality of the Roman form of capital punishment known as Crucifixion, was the most dramatic way for God the Father to demonstrate his immense love for all of us. As Pope John Paul the Great said (removed from any formal record) after viewing Mel Gibson's movie: *The Passion of the Christ* – "It is as it was!"

The savagery and the incredible brutality of that movie were an accurate interpretation of events because his own people and the Romans knew that it would take an enormous amount of clout by evil to try to destroy Goodness incarnate, living Goodness, Goodness itself! Jesus Christ. Though not a bone of his body was broken, the rest of him was transformed into a visage beyond recognition! And then, the last drop of his blood gushed forth for us and for our salvation, when his precious heart whose only "crime" was to love us to excess, was pierced with a lance!

God the Father and Jesus both loved us THAT MUCH for him to absorb into himself the sinfulness and sins of the entire human race which ever was or will be – thus BECOMING SIN, morally, mentally, physically, and viscerally – he who never committed a sin in his life. We cannot even begin to imagine what that must have *felt like* to Jesus. The only real clue that we have is in the garden of Gethsemane. Just *thinking* about the process that lay ahead made his sweat turn to *drops of blood!*

Why did he take on this *enormous* weight of sin? He did it out of love, extreme, unrelenting love; so that by laying down his life, *he could destroy sin and restore life for all of us!* He loved us beyond all telling! He is the only person who could have done this! We are truly eternally indebted to him!

And so, **at the moment when Jesus, freely, willingly, voluntarily and lovingly handed over his life** (no one could take his life from him – thus Satan is now defeated), **the fullness of time had truly arrived!**

God the Father's response was to love him so intensely, and to restore his physical human life to an entirely new level – which was forever, now, linked with a brand new spiritual integration – the likes

of which were distorted by Original Sin. Resurrection to this newness of life – which happened to Jesus - is what no human person ever experienced before, nor will experience until Jesus' Second Coming.

Then, because he wants all of us to be with him where he now is – in heaven – he shall raise all of us from our graves and bestow the fullness of this *new* life of resurrection! It will be a grand and glorious day for those who believe in him, and who await the day with longing and hope! For those who consciously refuse to believe, those who want nothing to do with his “hour”, with his “fullness of time”, with his “grace,” with his promises, it will mean eternal separation from God and a fiery eternity.

God the Father is the only one who knows when that Last Day will be. Jesus, therefore, wanted to be really and truly present with those who believe in him and who await that day – however many generations it might take. And so, he set up a forward-looking organization and called it “My Church.” It would be empowered by the promised Holy Spirit (a gift from both he and his Father) and it would be effective in making he, himself, present on earth, mystically and spiritually, but, so very really and truly, until the end of time.

On Pentecost that Spirit was sent – and it was received by the Apostles who were waiting in prayer for its arrival. And the Church was launched. There was no question that the Spirit was now present; there was no question that Jesus was still present; there was no question that Jesus truly is the image of the Father's glory!

By means of the sacraments, the church, at the instruction of Jesus, applies his own grace and love to several situations in a person's life. By means of prayer – the initiated Christian keeps his bond with God and with his brothers and sisters in faith! By loving service to all his brothers and sisters and to the whole world a Christian truly experiences the reality and presence of Jesus and his Father. The Holy Spirit empowers him to love and serve the Lord, most especially by means of the Eucharistic Celebration.

What this all means, especially since the Eucharist, the source and summit of the very life of the Church is directly related to the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday – the “fullness of

time,” Jesus’ “hour” – the moment of “grace” is always NOW! Each and every moment of the day celebrates the victory of Jesus and his promise to return as judge. **We are living in the “fullness of time.”**

In order to ensure that the Truth about the “fullness of time” be kept and taught, proclaimed, celebrated and lived out, the story about it needed to be kept in tact and transmitted throughout the ages. Before it was written down, it was transmitted orally – literally by telling the stories of Jesus and what he did and what he said, and most especially how it was all validated by his resurrection from the dead; and then after his Ascension into heaven, it was transmitted by the Apostles who carried out his wishes and brought that story, and all it entailed, to the whole world. The written version came as the eyewitness were getting old and dying. The New Testament then came after the oral Tradition. All of this inspired and guaranteed for authenticity by the Holy Spirit.

If we believe so strongly that all sacred scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we must surely believe as strongly that oral Tradition (which came chronologically first), - the words, teaching, actions of the Apostles concerning Jesus in doctrine, liturgical practice, customs and morality - was inspired by the same Holy Spirit; and that therefore, Tradition and Scripture *together* are meant to preserve the “hour” of Jesus, the “fullness of time,” as two sources for the same deposit of faith! They are totally complementary and are each necessary for the completion of the other.

Since these are spiritual matters – it is not such a gigantic leap to also believe that the only way that these spiritual truths could be preserved, is for the spiritual transmission of the Spirit of Truth which is accomplished in the Apostolic Line of Succession (originating the day of Pentecost). This simply means that the Apostles appointed successors and ordained them (laid hands on them) in order to transmit spiritually, both the fullness of the priesthood of Christ, which they themselves possessed, and also the guarantee of spiritual Truth (by the inspiration and gift of the Holy Spirit).

Bishops are the supreme guardians of Truth in the Church. They did not bestow this Spirit upon themselves. It was given at Pentecost to

the eleven, and then transmitted by valid ordination to the episcopacy ever since and will be so until the end of time.

The Teaching Authority of the Church emanates from this Apostolic Line of Succession and the Primacy of St. Peter as the head of the college of bishops. Peter was given, by Christ himself, the power to lead the Church and to keep it safe from the very powers of hell. Peter's successors, as bishop of Rome, also possess this Petrine Function by their very election as pope – this function has also been transmitted by an unbroken line of succession, and will continue until the end of time.

It is so comforting to know that the Church stands on *three solid legs*: **Oral Tradition, Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Succession** – all guarded and guided by the Holy Spirit and his many gifts! They are all given so that we may live most fully in the NOW, most fully in Jesus' "hour," most fully in Jesus' "fullness of time." For it is the fullness of our time too!

And so the question I pose is this: "How much of this do you believe? Do you really *want* to live in Jesus' "moment," his "hour," and his "fullness of time?" Is there evidence in your life that you do? Is there evidence in your life that you don't? Is there anything we can do about it if we don't? Can we afford not to?

Auxiliary Question: HOW WOULD YOU DO IT?

If you had spiritual power to save people from sin and eternal death, had a message about this that not only gave vital and essential information about right living, but real power for actually doing the living in a way that would guarantee participation in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life; and you wanted to transmit it intact from this point on, to all generations, until the end of the world? How would you do it?

Would you not commission people to **tell all about it**, and **write it down** – so that the telling and the writing could complement each other and safeguard accuracy, especially of interpretation; and then – since it is spiritual in nature – **imbue your successors with a guarantee of authenticity** (Truth about the matter) by passing on the

Spirit of Truth by some kind of an imbuing ceremony? And then institute channels of flowing power which make it all a sin-forgiving and life-giving reality for those who wanted to participate in it by faith? Isn't this exactly what Jesus did? Is there a better way to do it? If so, what is it?

How would YOU do it?

(PS I, for one, am quite satisfied with the way Jesus did it!)

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