

Francis on discernment in a time of epochal change

“The times we are living in require us not only to experience change, but to accept it in the realization that ours is a time of epochal change – I have said this many times. If we had any doubts about this, Covid has made it amply evident: indeed, the outbreak of the virus cannot be restricted to a question of medicine and health care; it is much more than a cold.

“We can respond in many different ways to the challenge of change. The problem is that while many actions and attitudes can be helpful and good, not all of them have the flavour of the Gospel. Here is the crux of the matter: discerning whether changes and actions have the flavor of the Gospel or not. For example, seeking established ways of doing things, very often anchored in the past, that ‘guarantee’ a sort of protection from risks, sheltering us in the world or a society that no longer exists (if it ever did), as if this determined order could quell the conflicts that history sets before us. That is the crisis of going backwards in order to find shelter.

“Another attitude might be that of exaggerated optimism – ‘Everything will be all right’ – moving too far forward without discernment and without taking necessary decisions. This optimism ends up ignoring the pain involved in this transformation and failing to accept the tensions, complexities and ambiguities of the present time, ‘consecrating’ the latest novelty as the ultimate reality and thereby dismissing the wisdom of the years.

“Both are a kind of flight. They are the response of the mercenary who sees the wolf coming and runs away: either towards the past or towards the future. Neither can lead to mature solutions. The concrete reality of the present time is where we must stay, there in today’s concrete reality. I prefer the response born of a trusting acceptance of reality, anchored in the wise and living Tradition of the Church, which enables us to put out into the deep *without fear*. At this moment of history, I feel that Jesus is once more inviting us to ‘put out into the deep’ (cf. *Lk 5:4*) trusting that he is the Lord of history and that, with his guidance, we will discern the direction to take. Our salvation is not ‘aseptic’, the product of a laboratory or a disembodied spiritualism: this is always the temptation of gnosticism, one that is contemporary, that is current. *Discerning the will of God* means learning to view realities with the Lord’s own eyes. It means not evading the realities that our people are experiencing, or anxiously seeking a quick and quiet exit provided by the ideology of the moment or prefabricated answers. Neither of these is capable of dealing with the more difficult and even dark moments of our history. These two paths would lead us to deny ‘our history as a Church, which is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work’ (*Evangelii Gaudium, 96*).”

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis
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