

Column041920
Companions on the Journey
April 19, 2020
Dear Friends,

Below are excerpts from an essay by Venerable Fulton Sheen (By Hook and By Crook) that I find profound, provocative and spot on given the circumstances of our world and our Church today. Sheen has been given a revelation by God here as he describes the relationship between the Church and the great feast of Easter.

“The Church, like Christ, not only lives, not only dies, but always rises from the dead. She is in love with death as a condition of birth; and with her, as with Christ, unless there is a Good Friday in her life, there will never be an Easter Sunday; unless there is the crown of thorns there will never be the halo of light; and unless there is the Cross there will never be the empty tomb.

In other words, every now and then the Church must be crucified by an unbelieving world and buried as dead, only to rise again. She never does anything but die, and for that peculiar reason she never does anything but live. Every now and then the very life seems to have gone out of her; she is palled with death; her blood seems to have been sapped out of her; her enemies seal the tomb, roll a stone in front of her grave, and say: “The Church will never rise again!” But somehow or other she does rise again.

At least a dozen times in history, the world has buried the Church and each time she has come to life again. . . . It is a strange but certain fact that the Church is never so weak as when she is powerful with the world; never so poor as when she is rich with the riches of the world; never so foolish as when she is wise with the fancies of the world. She is strongest with Divine Help when she is weakest with human power, for like Peter she is given the miraculous draught of fishes when she admits by her own power she has labored all the night and taken nothing.

The world makes the fatal mistake of believing that her soul is dead and her faith is departed. Not so! The faith, even in those days of lesser prayer, is solid – for it is the faith of the centuries, the faith of Jesus Christ. What may be weak is her discipline, her prayerfulness, and her saintliness, for these are of men, whereas her faith is of God. A renewal of spirit, then, will come not by changing her way of thinking, for that is divine, but her way of acting, for that is human.

But the world, failing to make this distinction between the Divine and the human in her, as it failed to make it in Christ, takes her for dead. To the world, her very life seems spent, her heart pierced, her body drained; in its eyes she is just as dead as the Master when taken down from the cross, and there is nothing left to do but to lay her in the sepulcher. There emerges, then, from her history one great and wonderful lesson and it is this: Christ rose from the dead, not because He is man, but because He is God. The Church rises from the sepulcher in which violent hands or passing errors would inter her, not because she is human, but because she is Divine. Nothing can rise from the dead except Divinity.

Even civilizations are born, rise to greatness, then decline, suffer, and die; but they never rise again. But the Church does rise again; in fact she is constantly finding her way out of the grave because she had a Captain who found His way out of the grave.

She will go on dying and living again and in each recurring cycle of a Good Friday and an Easter Sunday her one aim in life will be to preach Christ and Him Crucified so as to rise with Him on Easter.

Peace,
Msgr. McHenry

