

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU SOW

This is a word of caution, and perhaps word of wisdom, about people that come from other Christian communities, Catholic, Protestant, or other. It is wrong to assume that those communities are not doing Christ's work of reaching and nurturing their members because their people don't seem to know much about God the way we think we do.

Sometimes people don't hear what is being preached or taught. Sometimes people don't want to hear, because of what God calls their "hardness of heart". Sometimes their faith is weak and they are not ready to respond. Some people "Church-hop", not to grow and mature but simply because a friend invites them, or entices them with something that sounds "new and exciting". It doesn't seem to matter what church or denomination they hop to. I have found all of these factors to be true in every faith community with which I have been in contact, and they are many.

Then there is the arrogant self-righteousness of those who assume that their denomination is the only one that has the "truth" and that every other is wrong. I have read many "statements of faith" and have always been amazed at those who say they are "standing on the Word". If this is true, why is there so much division in the Church? Is it not, rather, that they are standing on their own *interpretation* of the Word, and that perhaps their interpretation is limited or even wrong? Heresy still abounds in the Church. There are many trees in a forest than the ones we see in front of us. If we define all trees by the few we see in our immediate vision, we are probably missing something in our definition. Perhaps we need to take a deeper walk into the forest!

The Church is full of babies, and once in awhile one of them grows up. This may mean going through the painful process of "spiritual adolescence". It took me about 35 years to get through that process, and I had four years of theological training and was ordained! It wasn't that I wasn't "saved" or didn't have knowledge of God. I still needed to be loved and nurtured in a way that I hadn't been up to that time. This is called discipling and is the responsibility of all members of God's family, not just the pastor. I was gently loved and nurtured into a relationship with God over several months. I was never asked or encouraged to leave the faith community to which I belonged. Had I been "preached at" or thrown tracts without a relationship, I would have run the other way as fast as I could!

People who didn't even know me, or attempt to know me, have tossed tracts at me at work. I had all I could do to keep from tearing them up and throwing them back in their face because it was not done with love or with any concern whether I already had a relationship with God. Articles, tracts, and books have their place as seeds or they wouldn't be on this website. But, they cannot be forced upon people or thrust in their face.

The "word" that gave rise to this article is this: "If there is rotten or defective seed in the garden, do we blame the gardener? If a child is born with a defect, do we blame the parents?" The gardener, of course, is responsible to nurture the seed that he planted, but

he doesn't always know the quality of the seed. He trusts that that seed that he planted was good seed. Parents who give birth to a defective child try to nurture that child as best they can. Sometime it takes a long time for the child to mature; sometimes it never does. The child needs to be loved, not criticized and condemned - or taken out of that family and brought into another family that one thinks is "better".

Over the years, I have heard people rejoicing about someone being "saved" from the Catholic or some other church. This betrays ignorance of other faith communities and doesn't glorify God. Each babe in Christ needs to be loved and nurtured into a meaningful relationship with God, just as we all need to be nurtured into maturity as a productive member of society. People need to feel and experience God's love in a real way from one of his children who really know him. That doesn't mean that they have to be taken out of their own faith community.

People are ready to hear about and accept God at different times, maybe a whole lifetime, maybe never. Many people, even in the natural, have trouble accepting love because they have never experienced it in any meaningful way before. We need to be very patient with people. Many factors impact our lives, and they are not all from Satan. Remember the parable of the Sower. A pessimistic reading indicates only 1 in 4 makes it. A more positive reading may indicate that we need to do more with the other 3 so they can also make it.

Maybe God is a lot more merciful than a lot of his "servants". Even some of the disciples wanted to call fire down from heaven! Sometimes the ground in which we sow has to be carefully tilled before the seed is sown. We need to remove the rocks, not put stumbling blocks or boulders in the way! Sometimes, as Jesus himself said, the rocks or pebbles are in our own eyes! Be sure they are removed from your eyes before you try to remove them from others.