Divine Renovation – Chapter 4 Summary and Discussion – January 2016

Chapter 4, Clearing Out the Junk, is a description by Fr. Mallon of what we need to ‘jettison if we are going to rebuild’. Structures and practices that no longer serve the mission or get in the way of the mission need to be identified and cleared in order to move forward. Fr. Mallon again returns to Pope Francis’ reflection on the Aparecida Document and his identification of specific ‘temptations against missionary discipleship’ choosing in particular to focus on some ‘junk’ carried over from past historical heresies and the results of clericalism which ultimately suppresses the baptismal identity. The chapter is a call to lifelong growth as mature Christians.

Laying out the historical background of Pelagiansim and Jansenism, Fr. Mallon sets the stage for how misunderstanding the relationship of grace and free will have created ‘junk’ that needs to be cleared. Anytime we dismiss our fallen human condition that “leads us to commit sin and leaves unable to do the good we desire to do” we begin to assemble the ‘junk’, believing instead that our own efforts at moral rigorism or some ascetic practices can draw us closer to God. Without an understanding and acknowledgment of the ‘bad news’ our fallen condition Fr. Mallon argues that the ‘Good News’ can never really be understood as just that, Good News. What the heresies have in common is that each falls to the temptation of self-justification. Our own moral rigorism and asceticism replace grace and mercy. These heresies, and whatever remnants remain, keep us from truly knowing the radical, scandalous mercy of God which is indeed Good News.

Fr. Mallon’s assessment of how some of the early Church’s struggles with particular heresies have continued to plague and influence the church through history, set the background for his observations of the consequences that have become some of the ‘junk’ that needs clearing out in order to move forward. He names three in particular:

- A culture of minimalism as a result of getting one’s ‘card punched’ by meeting the basic requirements. It is not a covenant faith lived out in relationship with God, an extravagant Father who proclaims an insatiable thirst for us but one of remaining in the parameters and being ‘good’.
- Heresies supporting self-justification before God “will never know the sheer audacity of God's mercy.” Absent the understanding of our need for salvation, for God’s gift of amazing grace, the Good News will never be fully grasped and consequently the resulting joy never experienced.
- Evangelization can only be effected through the evangelized. If we never move beyond the bare minimums of religious observation and the Good News remains undiscovered, evangelization is nothing more than a burden, something else to do.

Getting rid of the ‘junk’ that has resulted from these past heresies requires that we make a clear commitment to the kerygma, the first proclamation of the Good News of Salvation (recall Pope Francis’ words in Evangelii Gaudium #164 about the fundamental role of the kerygma)

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

The discussion by Fr. Mallon on clericalism describes the ‘junk’ created by suppression of the baptismal identity. Two distinct classes arise, the ordained/religious and the laity, with unwritten rules; the ordained/religious were called to be the ‘holy’ ones, doing the work of evangelization, while the laity were called to ‘pray, pay and obey’. The normative call of ordinary Christian living “to mature in prayer and the spiritual life, to grow in knowledge, to evangelize and serve others” got lost in the junk. “The clericalism of the past left most Catholics in spiritual infancy, and did not even begin to equip them for the work of ministry.” (77)

The chapter concludes with a significant discussion of ‘Redefining Pastoral Care’ and ‘Equipping the Saints’. Fr. Mallon argues that ‘the end game of pastoral care is to bring people to maturity’ and this requires discernment of the gifts and charisms that God gives to the Church as a whole. Pastors are called “to preach God’s word, to celebrate the Sacraments and to lead, while calling and allowing the charisms that are spread among the People of God to be exercised” (84).
In reading this chapter what stood out for you? Surprised you? Challenged you? With what did you agree? Disagree? What did you underline or highlight? What notes did you make?

Questions for Discussion:

1) Fr. Mallon contends that the Second Vatican Council’s call to rediscover the universal call to mission died a rapid death as the ‘lay apostolate’ referred to in the documents virtually disappeared within the life of the average parish replaced by the ‘lay ministry’. (78)
   a. How do you understand the distinction between 'lay apostolate’ and ‘lay ministry’? How does this understanding affect the understanding of our role in evangelization?
   b. In the context Fr. Mallon describes, where can you identify the lay apostolate at work in your community?

   Link to the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity by Pope Paul VI

2) In his discussion of clericalism Fr. Mallon cautions “If the ministry of paid lay staff creates passivity among the average parishioner and confirms in their minds that they could never do such things themselves, we have advanced the clerical model of ministry” (80).
   a. How well do think the ‘average parishioner” in your parish understands their baptismal call (“to mature in prayer and the spiritual life, to grow in knowledge, to evangelize and serve others”)? What may be keeping them from understanding?
   b. In what ways are ‘average’ parishioners encouraged to fulfill their baptismal call in your parish? What are some steps that might help the average parishioner become more aware of this call?
   c. How would you respond to Fr. Mallon’s statement in light of your parish experience (as PCL’s or ordained/religious staff)?

3) Fr. Mallon writes; “Thus, the primary task of the pastor is not to do all the work of ministry himself, but to equip the saints to do the work of ministry” (82).
   a. How are gifts and charisms discerned in your parish?
   b. How are parishioners’ gifts and charisms considered in how they live out their baptismal call both inside and outside the parish?
   c. (for Pastors) – How were you challenged/encouraged by Fr. Mallon’s ideas on redefining pastoral care? What do you see as the challenges of discerning and calling forth the charisms of your community in an intentional manner? The rewards?

4) Commenting on the tolerance for lifelong parishioners stuck in a place of spiritual immaturity Fr. Mallon writes: “A church that makes missionary disciples has at its very heart a desire and capacity to bring people from immaturity to maturity. A parish church that is doing this well will and must always have a considerable proportion of members who are in their spiritual infancy. If it does not, then there are no spiritual babies being born and that church is sterile. However, a church where the majority of member are spiritual infants has abandoned the central task of pastoral care, which is to labour and strive for all to be brought to maturity in Christ” (81).
   a. How do you see this spectrum of spiritual maturity represented in your parish? What might your observations lead you to discover about intentional discipleship in your community?
   b. What opportunities for adult formation are available to feed those at various levels of spiritual maturity?