

In 1429 St. Joan of Arc was about to set out on her mission to save France from the invading English armies. She was just a young girl with no military experience, but she had somehow convinced French leaders to follow her inspiration and call. As Joan was leaving her village some women from the crowd asked her if she was not frightened to be heading through the countryside filled with enemy soldiers. She replied, "I am not afraid. God is with me. I was born for this."

I am not afraid. God is with me. I was born for this. Joan of Arc lived in a time of chaos and danger, but she recognized that she must not regret the times she lived in. She was born for her times – to change them. So were we. We, too, live in gathering chaos and much that we are familiar with is passing away. But it is not an accident that these are our times. We were personally chosen by God to be alive as members of His Catholic Church here and now.

We just heard The Parable of the Tenants. At one level Jesus is directing the parable to the Chief Priests and Pharisees because they

were rejecting that in Him, Jesus, the Kingdom of God had come to full fruition. But this failure to recognize Jesus and His Kingdom is a recurring pattern throughout history. And here we are again in our days with the rejection of the Kingdom and the chaos surrounding us.

For a vision of how Catholics are to think about and act in the times we live in I recommend a book, From Christendom to Apostolic Mission, by Mons. James Shea. Its central thesis is that there are two kinds of eras for the Church. “Christendom” is when the foundation of a society is Christian. The laws and customs assume the basic truths of Christian doctrine and vision of the world. This is an advantage in raising children in the faith. It’s easy to practice one’s religion. But the danger is complacency and hypocrisy. The very cultural strength of the faith tends towards people leaning on the externals and institutions. We in the West lived in Christendom from the fourth century until the mid-twentieth century, but the faith has slowly faded, and we now live in a post-Christian, even anti-Christian, society.

Therefore, we live in an “Apostolic Age”. That is when the surrounding society and culture are oblivious or hostile to the faith. In an Apostolic Age the Church is not a major influence on the culture and sees herself as very different from the world around her. Since the faith is not respectable, in fact, is looked down on, it takes more commitment and courage to be Catholic. In an Apostolic Age not only the clergy, but especially the laity, are called to be witnesses. Lay people’s holiness is necessary for the Church to survive. There is a higher commitment among the clergy and laity since there is no social and economic reason for the lukewarm to remain in the Church.

The downside to an Apostolic Age is that error is widespread, seeping in from the surrounding non- or anti-Christian culture. Apostasy, leaving the faith, is easy and rewarded socially. And it’s hard to raise kids in the faith during these times. This can lead to discouragement and doubt. Because of the high cost of discipleship, the

great danger of an Apostolic Age is cowardice and despair. That is where we are now. Christendom is gone. We live in an Apostolic Age.

How are we to think and act in such a time? Remember St. Joan of Arc's words? "I'm not afraid. God is with me. I was born for this." Shea says, imagine a meeting of the Apostles on Pentecost. Peter says, "OK, Jesus told us to go and make Disciples of all nations. What are our resources? Bishops? Eleven. Priests and Deacons? None. Theologians? None. Seminarians? None. Christian believers? A couple of hundred. Church buildings? None. Schools? None. Money? A few coins. Society's attitude toward us? Ignorant or hostile." Perfect!

If the Apostles had thought in Christendom mode, they would have given up before they started. But they were filled with hope and the Spirit – and knew they were sent – on an Apostolic mission. "I'm not afraid. God is with me. I was born for this."

Are we thinking as Christendom or Apostolic Catholics? Apostles are by definition different from other people – weird, even, in their

eyes. If we're not, we're failing. In an Apostolic Age, Catholics, "need to be convinced that Christ is . . . the only hope for us. They need to be convinced of the bad news; that humanity has, through its own rebellion, sold itself into slavery to the prince of darkness, and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. At the same time, they need to be equally convinced of the Good News: that God in His mercy has come among us to set us free from our sins and death, and for those who turn to Christ, the nightmare of life apart from God can be transformed into a dawn of eternal hope."

We can no longer slide by and expect other people to do the heavy lifting in our Church. We need the Church and the Church needs us. We need to step up. This is ministry weekend. In the narthex are tables with people wanting to welcome you to a deeper commitment to Christ's Church. Join the battle. Commit more of your life to Christ!

I say this, not as an HR manager trying to fill slots. Committing to ministry is going to be for your spiritual benefit. Those Catholics who do

this will grow in their own relationship with Jesus. But they will also change the world even in these times. Remember St. Joan of Arc. She had her mission given her by God, so do we. It won't be easy, but it will be glorious for those of us who want to live as Catholics in this Apostolic Age we've been born into -- and for. The Chief Priests and Pharisees of Jesus' time could reject Him and His Kingdom, crucify Him, but they couldn't defeat Him. The same goes for the chief priests of our own culture. We must not be afraid. God is with us. We were born for this.