

Francis, go and repair my house, which, as you see, is falling down.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the days of my boyhood included the whole of eastern Pennsylvania within its authority. And it had already a century and half's history prior to the 1950's – so it had produced more than enough clergy and many a parish within the city itself. Catholics rarely told people what neighborhood they came from. It was always, "I'm from St. Bernard's" or "I'm from Holy Child" or from "Most Precious Blood" or "St. Bridget's." It had a free school system ranging from first grade to senior high school – a high school to match every public high.

During the 1930's of course physical growth had stalled – what with the Great Depression ending a prior building boom. But already, in connection with big developers, the Church knew where the post-Depression construction would be located and already had land marked out strategically for future parish plants – church, school, convent, and rectory. And indeed, come the 1950's, parishes of great size spread into what were once farmlands, rising like mini-cathedrals among row upon row of new houses. We were really good at brick and mortar expansion. Little did we foresee that so many of those old parishes (and new) would be left behind by outward migrations into once pastoral (in the sense of sheep-herding) landscapes.

You can see the *early* symptoms of such a *material* response to the Good News of our Gospel tradition. The four Gospels – and the writings of St. Paul – promote and foster what the New Testament called *metanoia* – translated: a transformative change of heart, a radical flip of one's mind – to see things in all their depth and holiness, beyond our everyday scan of things. Even then that was something Jesus' own disciples had trouble achieving. They, like everyone else, were stuck within the range of their ordinary eyeballs and habits. When Jesus, after a long lesson, tells Simon (Peter) to push his boat out into the deep and lower his nets for a catch (in other words "go deep" in the poetic sense of the words), he complains "We've been fishing all night *in the usual sense* of the term and have come up with nothing; what more can we do?"

Or take that moment when Peter, James and John are privileged to see Jesus transfigured on a mountain top, flanked by Moses and Elijah. Their reaction? They want to construct three chapels on the spot - brick and mortar. As in the case of St. Francis shortly after his conversion to a more spiritual life: a voice from the crucifix in the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano says three times: *Francis go and repair my house, which, as you see, is falling down.* And Francis thinks: How many bricks, two-by-fours, tiles; how much labor and funds will I need. He has had a startling experience of deep significance (a summons to reform the whole Church) but he remains stuck in his everyday world of "fixing" a specific problem. He will soon wake up to the depths of thought and vision intended by that voice – as we well know. But it takes a jolt sometimes to open our minds and hearts to dimensions of larger, deeper vitality, grace, and heartfelt care and concern.

A jolt like the one the Church is responding to today? Let's hope the awakening God intends of us – by the many jolts of the past half century – amounts to more than rearranging the furniture, than thinking: bricks, two-by-fours, tiles, scaffolds . . . A genuine conversion of all believers from top to bottom is what's needed.

Geoff Wood