

CORPUS AMBASSADOR



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A Church to Keep or Abandon?

We are living through one of the darkest hours of the Catholic Church.

There have been worse times than this. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Popes were guilty of murder, openly lived with mistresses and neglected children born from this unlawful and evil way of life.

Citing the fact that there were worse times does not, however, bring us hope. Ultimately our hope is not in a structure or in an institution, not even in the church at large. Our hope is in God.

Nonetheless, many of us are shattered to the core of our being.

We have, after all, sought guidance and inspiration from a Church that seems to have forsaken God and a structure that accepts the abuse of children, sexually exploiting trusting, innocent young human beings.

We have broken the lilies of the field, the choicest sheep of the flock, the gentle birds of the air who reach for the sky and seek the light of the sun. We plundered them as they sought and expressed the glory and gift of being alive.

How do we justify or even explain the shattering of such beauty? How do we look into innocent and loving eyes and lead them astray?

Jesus entrusted the Gospel to a community, to a band of brothers and sisters to be sure. Brothers and sisters do not all think alike. The Gospel is meant to include us, most surely, but not by eliminating the larger community.

If our hope is in God, then this hope finds community with the range of people whom God loves. Hope is a partnership.

Jesus chooses twelve apostles and they follow him in sometimes radically different ways as they search for common ground.

Hope is a community and a fellowship. We do not agree at times with all that is said and done. We are expected and have the right to follow this dissent.

Jesus made clear that God makes the rain and the sun available to the just and the unjust. Each of us is a gift and a burden for the other. We have no perfect partners to choose from among our collaborators. If such were the case, we would not be among those who hear the Gospel and are attracted to it.

The Catholic Church has endured for two millennia. When there were dark moments, as there are now, two viable ways of searching for the light again are possible.

First, we can go our own way. To do this, however, in safety and sanity and sincerity, we can choose to withdraw without rejecting completely. When we catch our

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breath again and when we hear the voice of Christ once more from the institution, we are able to return our allegiance.

In a dark time, an almost unbearable hour, we may give the darkness more of a hearing than it deserves. We may come to see that our rejection of the darkness was not the same as affirming there was nothing more in the Church except darkness.

Some of the greatest scholars of our time, Steven Pinker of Harvard University among them, assure us we are living in the least violent time in human history. Every age of the past, in every way, was more violent and less safe. To draw out all of the specifics and proofs of this would require a larger article than this but they are there.

This leads us to our second viable response. As we withdraw in some ways from the evil of the institution, we also keep a sharp eye on the prophets it inspires, who speak and write against the corruption in the Church.

We have never lived through a period of only darkness in our world and in our lives. If we withdraw our allegiance totally from the church, we shall find a legion of fellow dissenters and we shall return with them when there is sufficient light on the horizon.

I learned this lesson when, as a student, I was in St. Peter's Square the night John XXIII was elected. Quite advanced in age and seemingly too mild of manner for the task, he disappointed many of us that night.

Yet, just weeks in office, he called for Vatican II to open the windows of a dark and airless Church to bring back the light. A few centuries before, Martin Luther let us know how deficient and even corrupt the Church was. Vatican II adopted many of Luther's prophetic calls for change.

On another scale, closer to our own time, many of us were disillusioned and heart-broken at much of John Paul II's agenda for the Church at large and the priesthood in particular. The cardinals he had created carefully to reinforce his agenda, surprisingly gave us Pope Francis who on the very first night of his election was clearly a sign of change. He was the first Jesuit Pope, the first from the New World, the first to be called Francis. We still find it difficult, some years later, to trace how this could have happened.

One of the most moving moments in St. Peter's Square occurred when he bowed his head and began by asking the people at large to give him their blessing. He is not a perfect Pope, because no one is. His stress is on mercy rather than law; his words: "Who am I to judge?" had never before been spoken by a Pope. We were reduced to silence. His words led us to our conscience and to God rather than to him.

A century before, John Henry Cardinal Newman had celebrated conscience first and the Pope only after that. That is all we need to know or to hope for in finding our way.

*Christianity is in trouble
and pregnant with possibilities.
Krista Tippet*