

# THE VISION STILL HAS TIME

The vision still has its time,  
presses on to fulfillment,  
and will not disappoint;  
if it delays, wait for it,  
it will surely come,  
it will not be late.

—Habakkuk 2:2-3

*Living our faith in a time of chaos*

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# A VISION OF COMPASSION

None of us like to be glared at! Tragically there exists a distorted type of Catholic ‘moralism’ which does just that. It’s not new but it’s particularly virulent amongst the critics of Pope Francis—right and left. It is dour, joyless and scolds.

Strangely, such ideologues—somehow believe they are more truly ‘Catholic’ or Christian than the Pope.

Their continuous attacks on Pope Francis show us what many have often thought: *‘You can be right. You can be dead right and bring death to all those around you!’*

The issue is really nothing to with orthodox theology at all. Such people may have the ‘words’ but they certainly do not possess the ‘music’... without which you can never evangelise.

Hence, it is always so sad to see such people in full flight denouncing others. Even if relentlessly ‘cross examining’ the Pope—or anyone for that matter—might bring forth a grain of ‘truth’—it can also be a ‘poison’. It is very far from the mercy of God.

For if people can only ever ‘glare’ at people, denounce or condemn them, what is really going on? ‘Heart’ surgery or therapy is badly needed!

That is why Pope Francis, our Holy Father, is challenging us not to ‘glare’ at others but to accompany and encourage our sisters and brothers—whatever their ‘illness’ and at whatever stage of the journey they are at. The Church is a ‘Field Hospital’ for all.

Let’s imitate, then, Pope Francis who finds God neither in condemning nor ‘glaring’—but in the ‘gaze’ which contemplates other persons as ends in themselves, even if they are infirm, elderly or physically unattractive or in any way ‘other’ to us.

This is the pastoral genius of Pope Francis... his interaction with real persons in front of him—his ‘gaze’—is a loving grasp of the

unique dignity at the heart of each person and a persevering defence of that uniqueness against our reduction to just another cog in the machine. For Francis does not ‘moralise’ about others... he accompanies them...

Witness Francis’s countless acts of mercy and compassion that we see so regularly on our screens. Pope Francis’s loving ‘gaze’ to the refugee, the child, the sick and the suffering touch people’s hearts powerfully... even or rather especially people who are not Catholics.

Each Pope brings his own special gifts to the Church and world. In a sense, the brilliant and holy Pope Benedict XVI finds God in listening to the beauty of Mozart and this is complemented by Francis who discovers God by ‘gazing’ at Caravaggio! It is no surprise then that the painting Pope Francis loves so much is Caravaggio’s *The Calling of Matthew*—where Jesus ‘gazes’ on the tax collector Matthew.

Yes, the pastoral authenticity of Pope Francis is precisely because he ‘gazes’ at people with love and then accompanies them—in order to take persons on a deeper journey.

As Paul Elie puts it: Francis has shown us again and again what it means for Catholics and the Church to accompany others. The Francis way of accompaniment is—You meet people where they are. You presume the good in them and hope that they will presume the good in you. You have a conversation. You open your mind and heart: you prepare to learn something from them. You go where they are going, if only for a little while, trusting that something good will come of it. You keep your wits about you, but you don’t let scruples rule you.

To build therefore what Francis calls a “culture of encounter”—is to accompany the persons God providentially places in our lives.

We Marists should ‘gaze’—don’t glare!



## PONDER THE WORD OF GOD

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.*

*And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."*

—Matthew 9:9-13


## REFLECT

- To 'cry with and to 'cry for' another person are different sides of the coin of compassion. Both require a deep empathy and a 'standing in the other's shoes' to feel their pain. Recall times when you have cried with or for others.

- Sometimes we need to balance/hold back our own emotions in order to truly be of comfort to someone who is grieving a loss in their life, e.g.: a loved one, a job, good health, personal independence. Can you recall a time in your life when you did this well? A time when you avoided a situation for fear of being overwhelmed or inadequate?
- If we are to be the face of Jesus in our world, our compassion must be shown in visible, tangible actions. Name/list some ways to reach out to those in sorrow.

## PRAY TOGETHER

Jesus of the table, you gathered unexpected people around hearths of hospitality. You stretched out your hand for grapes and bread, for wine and welcome. May we populate our tables with all kinds of people. Because at the table our hearts can be glad for a while. Amen.



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