

Jesus builds his Church on the rock of Peter – and it's still here, despite Peter not being quite the rock we might imagine or hope for. And that's true for most of the Popes, if not all, that will follow and, for that matter, bishops, priests and laity. A close look at the Church can be depressing, as can a close look at any human grouping or relationship. As Benedictines, dedicated to living in community, we know as much about this as anyone. It's a daily trial and blessing. The temptation is always to leave the fraternal battle line for a quieter life on one's own. Pope Francis describes this temptation as the 'isolated conscience' and describes how it works within the Church: it leads to the formation of special interest or, better perhaps, self-interested groups:

*A charitable openness to the other is replaced by a clinging to the supposed superiority of one's own ideas... Under the banner of restoration or reform, people give long speeches and write endless articles offering doctrinal clarifications or manifestos that reflect little more than the obsessions of small groups. (Let Us Dream p.71)*

And much more in the same vein. This is an embattled Pope striving to keep the Church united and he does so, not by taking sides with one interest group or another, but by discerning a deeper dynamic at work:

*What is hidden is an attempt to cling to something petty I fear to lose, something that feeds my ego: power, influence, freedom, security, status, money, property or some combination of these. (p. 70)*

These are the traps which the Pope is here to bind or loose, and so are the Bishops and the priests and the laity. We all have this power to love or to hate; to live with each others' weaknesses and transform them by showing mercy or to reject one another because of our failings, hardening our hearts, not only against one another, but against God. No,

*Jesus did not found the Church as a citadel of purity nor as a constant parade of heroes and saints – although thank God we do not lack these. It is something much more dynamic: a school of conversion, a place of spiritual combat and discernment, where grace abounds along with sin and temptation, like its members, the Church can be an instrument of God's mercy because it needs that mercy. (p. 72)*

If nothing else, such language calls for self-examination. Not a bad beginning for Lent.

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