

Uncertain Times Call for Certain Things

By Deacon Joe Sandrini, Director of Diaconal Formation

“Y’er burning daylight, damn it!” That’s a familiar shout from my father-in-law when we are working cattle. For those not bilingual in cowhand speak, it translates into formal English as, “please get back to the task at hand, because it appears you are not currently working to achieve the goal we have set for ourselves and have limited time to accomplish.”

As winter settles across Wyoming, we’ve burnt a lot of daylight in 2016. The shorter days seem emphasize this. The year is fading into history, dying in a sense as nature closes in on itself for winter. “Where has the year gone?” This refrain seems to be on the lips of most folks these days... and I’m still having trouble remembering to write 2016 on my checks!

The senescence of the current year brings a lot of uncertainty as we await the new one. We wait for a new Bishop. We wait to see what the new administration in Washington will bring. We wait on an uncertain future in a culture pushing God to the margins of life.

There is always uncertainty in the future - worry in waiting. But, we remember, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth... he is our help and our shield” (Ps. 121:2; Ps. 33:20b). The remedy is being focused, grounded on what is truly important – Christ. Not in some unstructured or vaguely pious way, but by leaning on Him in sacrament and prayer; and then bringing His love for each of us to others. These are the antidotes for worry, commissions really, which every Christian is sacramentalized to carry out, not just men in Holy Orders.

But, how do we live out this God given call within lives quickening each day? Especially, as time seems to speed up with technological advancements piling on more “things” by imposition or choice. And with them, problems and poor thinking that can lead to an improper understanding of what it means to be truly human. It’s no wonder we have more uncertainty and worry about our own lives, our families, our nation, and our planet.

The tempting answer is to rely on ourselves and not God. So, we often look for greener pastures. If I could do this or that - if I had this or that it would be better. The enticement is to look beyond the graces and blessings we already have. It is a trap of the devil.

Instead, we need to go deeper right where we are in reception and thanksgiving for the goodness and grace we already have - even in our challenges and struggles. To realize adding complexity in pursuit of solutions leads us physically, emotionally and most importantly spiritually to being spread out. Something that can make us an easy target for the devil.

This idea was made more present to me recently while preparing an upcoming diaconal formation weekend. In a book assigned to our deacon aspirants, Deacon James Keating writes, “The temptation (in life) is always go broad, when the divine call is usually a call to go and stay deep.” By deep, Keating means “...fastening of our sacramental character to the continual stream of grace that is our participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy and acts of service.” We need

to stay grounded in a regular prayer life nourished by the sacraments, which leads to a Faith manifest in good works.

Everyone fantasizes about bounding in new pastures, or going after shiny things. This is simply because we are all weak and have a tendency to wander. Bishops, priests, deacons, and men in formation are no different. However, all of us need a structured spiritual life. We need to stay aware, accept and live out the fact that we are dependent upon the transcendent. Simply put, to reduce worry and uncertainty, embrace and live out the mysteries of our faith through prayer, worship and moral living.

To put a little meat on this and make it practical, we can better handle the unknown and have security in our future by “baptizing” some popular advice from author Stephen Covey: *Do the most important things in life first, and be clear about your priorities then act on them.*

What is truly important and a priority? It can seem like things well beyond what we can affect. Look at this piece of advice as a call to focus on things you can control. Things you can do to make a real difference not just in the here and now, but for eternity – pray, adore God, be open to grace and share His love.

You might worry about global things, things you really cannot influence immediately, so act locally as they say. Try applying the Catholic teaching of subsidiarity to your own life. Direct and act upon the matters close at hand. Resolve in the New Year to pray and serve others more deeply. After all, we are burning daylight.