

ACC Homily: IT's TIME TO JUMP!

As we approach the close of this Council, I address you not as a theologian, not as a biblical scholar, not as a community organizer but a committed Catholic who can no longer deal with the pain of an unhealthy, dysfunctional Church that apparently chooses or refuses to fix itself. I am a member of the Planning Committee for this Council but I am just like you! I love the legacy that the Church has offered me and know that many solutions for the ills we face today are found in Vatican II.

The readings for today are profound. The **first reading from Corinthians (1Cor 12: 1-14)** asks us to take account of our gifts with courage and confidence: gifts given generously by the Spirit to be used for the common good. The **second reading from Acts (Acts 2: 1-11)** confirms that we have all been *called to one place where the Spirit's fire ignites in us a burning desire* for reform inviting us to speak boldly about the issues that continue to damage our Church. The Gospel tells us that the disciples locked the doors in fear but Jesus appeared saying "Peace be with you". That peace is being experienced here and now as we know that the time for reform has come.

Parenthetically, Jesus did not set out to create a new religion as the majority of Jesus' followers were Jews who saw themselves as reformers of Judaism, not founders of a faith different from Judaism. Jesus had little choice but to speak His reform issues within the context of Judaism. So too have we been called to reform the Church we love that has gone astray.

The Scripture readings are so relevant for us today! We are a gifted people who to date have kept the light of those gifts hidden allowing and tolerating abuse of every imaginable kind to victimize us. This Council says "We are victims no more!" We've been called by name to attend this historic gathering and the fire and energy are so present and alive. This, dear friends, is Church! The paths we are called to now have taken definition from our listening sessions, from our plenary speakers, from your participation in Reform in Action. We celebrate this new beginning to actualize those gifts as we are called to do for the common good.

We spent tens of thousands of hours on the Planning Committee reaching out to Church, the People of God, to understand where specifically the Sensus Fidelium hurts, what they hope for and how committed we all are to change. We didn't gather to discuss again the pains and dashed hopes merely to complain again about the status quo. No! We are no longer a Church of the Catacombs—hidden and secret—cowering in fear of being discovered, reported and punished. We came here called and gifted

and focused on the prize, Jesus Christ. This is not a Council designed to “*learn and leave*” remaining the same. People of God, you have been changed and because of that change, the change in the Church has already begun in you, and you, and you.

We have too long lived in an institutional culture where over-control, blind compliance and dependence have defined us as mute, passive and obedient. We have naively and compliantly become the child’s story of a grasshopper trapped in a lidded jar. Try as he might to escape, he jumps repeatedly hitting the lid often for hours until the realization comes that there is futility in trying. When he finally stops, he tries no more – never hoping to escape imprisonment again. Even when the lid is removed, the grasshopper accepts his fate and makes no attempt to leave the jar. Many Catholics feel that there is no hope---never recognizing the unopened gift of Vatican II or never believing they have the power to actualize it.

Our Church is currently in a restorationist mode, a Church of transactions: changing the rules, changing the Missal and its language, issuing a Charter that is whimsically followed, self-reporting audits that reshape reality, funding-flawed studies to absolve responsibility but blame the times, an inanimate villain that can neither be held responsible nor accountable. Sadly, these are all attempts at control and in secular jargon; these recommendations are akin to placing lipstick on a pig.

This is our moment, a moment to celebrate that we are a gifted people becoming a gifted Church stepping out of that jar as thinking, innovative, adult Spirit-filled people. We are diverse and as such must be tolerant and respectful of the differences present among us but we have been called to embrace the faith we share because our boss, my friends, is a Jewish carpenter: humble, gentle, kind and tolerant of these differences.

When minds are open, solutions appear; when we share in seeing things uniquely we become more flexible, more tolerant of ambiguity and differences and we enjoy one another in the curiosity of the vast Universe we have been given and the universal love that we can call upon that makes us uniquely Catholic evangelizing others through that love. “See how those Christians love one another!” should be our mantra. It is out of love we act; it will be out of love that we use our God-given skills to breathe new life into our Church helping it to be that beacon of light and justice in the world.

The Spirit invites us to use all our skills, to be fully human, to be fully adult. We are children no more; we are victims no more; we have been invited out of the jar to act in concert with Jesus’ example to

reform our Church as dedicated Catholics who act responsibly, with accountability. When we truly realize who we are and why we are called, we must act differently! We can trust and move forward collegially and collaboratively reaching out to the disenfranchised, the poor, the weak, the ailing and those who have suffered at the hands and deeds of this misguided clerical culture.

We believe the People of God can stand boldly in front of those who want to silence or punish us have accused us of misrepresenting the facts of Vatican II yet none of these accusations are specific and they remain hollow. We have been accused of creating schism by those who fear that we are challenging the status quo. Fear tactics are only the mask used by those who themselves fear loss of power and control but the Spirit has visited us here and the Spirit is not about fear but about love and the courage of conscience. The status quo is about a domineering power that keeps us victimized and in bondage but the Spirit breathes new life in us as we are pregnant with the hope of a tomorrow that actively invites us all to be Church in a new paradigm of freedom and responsibility. We have attempted to demonstrate that vision in the Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

We are all called to be agents of transformational change, vessels transformed and filled with the grace of a vision of the future of our Church. Scripture said it well when it says "Without a vision, the people will perish!"

We have a vision of the future; that future is both exciting and motivating to live the faith Jesus left us as legacy. The instruments of that change are you! You have been called and you are gifted beyond measure; the work we have all been called to do is daunting but we are planting seeds that hold future promise. Personally, I disagree with Sr. Joan (a mortal sin, I am sure) but I believe we can see the fruits of our labors in our own lifetime.

How do we do this? Get the tapes and transcripts from this Council, hold small group meetings from your home, and bring these resources to your small Christian community, your parish. Expose others to the freedom we already possess. Invite them to act responsibly in actualizing this change. Is this evolution or revolution? I leave that to your discernment.

If we have expanded your understanding of the impact of the growing Hispanic culture is having on the culture and our Church, we have moved forward. *For God's sake, it's time to JUMP!*

If we have stimulated your thinking about seeing Church both as people and HOME, we have moved forward. *For God's sake, it's time to JUMP!*

If we demonstrated for you unactualized freedom we already have through Church documents, we have moved forward. *For God's sake, it's time to JUMP!*

If we believe we, personally, have been called and recruited to the reform of the Catholic Church, we have moved forward. *For God's sake, it's time to JUMP!*

If we have discovered that our skills are ready to engage in a new, prophetic vocation as an activist, we have moved forward. *For God's sake, it's time to JUMP!*

Sr. Joan asked us "Are we willing to try?" I ask you, Church, People of God, "Are we willing to try?"

We stand united in faith, hope and love in reforming our beloved Church. I conclude with this quote from Nelson Mandela that I believe fits this occasion with precision:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."