From the Editor and Table of Contents

Patrick Fitzpatrick

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From the Editor

From attempt to attempt

When I was in high school there were two founts of knowledge — the teacher and the textbook. What they taught we learned. I recall a reflection entitled Teaching — Old and New: “How long ago, it seems, the days / When to profess was to possess — / When a teacher’s might was in her being right.” That was then.

Today when I glance into high school classrooms I see most of the students in small groups working together, with the teacher as overseer. Individual research has greatly increased due to the prevalence of the computer and its encyclopedic possibilities. The teacher and the textbook are no longer the only founts of knowledge. That is now.

Do people see the teaching church stuck in “then”? Life moves on and it remains self-assured, giving the impression it already has the answer to whatever issue may arise, a never changing anchor in an ever-changing world.

The Pentecost story tells us: “each one heard the disciples speaking in the native language of each.” The message spoke directly to them. Is that true now? It would appear not. In our Food for Thought section we’re told that one reason why people don’t go to church is: “It (church) isn’t relevant to our lives. It’s too remote and emotionally disconnected.”

Oblate Fr Ron Rolheiser, a widely read Catholic writer, is convinced that the greatest need of today’s church is a vocabulary of faith, a vocabulary for today’s people and their experiences, “We don’t have the words” he says. The result? We bore.

Good teachers are good communicators: they speak the language of their hearers.

Bad teachers have one thing in common — they don’t connect, they don’t communicate — they are b-o-r-i-n-g. They may know it all, but they fail to get it across.

Jesus recommended that we bring out from the storeroom what is new as well as what is old. The Church has a past to preserve, but also a present to influence and a future to create. It was interesting to hear Pope Benedict XVI’s successor as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Archbishop Levada, say recently “the living tradition is much larger than the simple and strict passing on of existing answers, insights and convictions from one generation to another.” And he added, “If we would give more attention to social issues during our liturgies more people might show up because they would feel that these celebrations would concern their lives, would offer them something more.” Like Oliver Twist they request, “Please, may I have some more.”

In another Food for Thought, Marist Fr Sean Fagan writes: “In today’s world the Church needs to teach, which means explaining and convincing, rather than simply declaring what we are obliged to think and to hold. Aristotle’s dictum is still valid, that no teaching takes place until someone has actually been taught.”

We have all experienced the classroom way of learning: texts, lectures, discussions and exams. Others among us have learned by becoming apprentices — today’s co-op learning. There is a third way of learning — the way of discipleship, the way Jesus chose to educate. He invited men and women to follow him, spend time with him, hang around with him, pick up his way of doing things, see how he related to others, pick up his values. They became his “disciples” through ongoing contact with him. A disciple never graduates, but remains a lifelong learner. They try to meet people where they are — the only possible place they can encounter them. They face the challenge of becoming missionaries to themselves in their international groupings. They invite others to interpret the presence of God in their own situations and through their own cultures. They themselves begin to find the Christ of other cultures, the Risen Christ, in other cultures.

Teaching — Old and New continued: “In our time / To profess is no longer to possess / To teach now is to learn, going from attempt to attempt / Trying to remember the old hard truth / And to dig it up, good as new, with dirty hands.”

Pat Fitzpatrick