

Teaching the Faith in a Postmodern World

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini is the retired Archbishop of Milan, Italy. He has two Ph.D.'s, one in Theology and one in Scripture, speaks 11 languages, has authored over 40 books, and was "in the running" for Pope during the conclave that elected Benedict XVI.

Cardinal Martini is now 81 and living in Jerusalem.

I share with you just a few thoughts taken from his article, "Teaching the Faith in a Postmodern World," which appeared in *America Magazine*:

To teach the faith in this world is nonetheless a challenge. To be prepared one must take to heart the following attitudes:

Do not be surprised by diversity. Do not be frightened by what is different or new, but look upon it as something in which is found a gift from God. Prove that you can listen to things quite different from what we usually think, but without immediately judging the speaker; try to understand what is being said and the basic arguments put forward. Young people are very sensitive about an attitude of nonjudgmental listening. This attitude gives them the courage to say what they really feel and to begin to distinguish what is really true from what only appears true. As St. Paul says, "Examine everything with discernment; keep what is good; keep your distance from every trace of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Take Risks. Faith is the great risk of life. "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but the one who loses his life for my sake will save it" (Matthew 16:25). Everything has to be give up for Christ and his Gospel.

Befriend the poor. Put the poor at the center of your life because they are the friends of Jesus who made himself one of them.

Nourish yourself with the Gospel. As Jesus tells us in the discourse on the bread of life: "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33).

To help develop these attitudes, I propose four exercises:

1. **Lectio divina.** This is a recommendation of John Paul II: 'It is especially necessary that the listening to the Word becomes an essential meeting, following the ancient and present-day tradition of **lectio divina**, enabling us to discover in the biblical text the living word that challenges us, directs us, which gives shape to our existence' (Novo Millennio Ineunte, No. 39). 'The Word of God nourishes life, prayer and the daily journey, it is the principle of unity of the community in a unity of thought, the inspiration for continuing renewal and for apostolic creativity' (Setting Out Again From Christ, 2002, No. 24).
2. **Self-mastery.** We need to learn anew that the frank opposition to desires is sometimes more joyful than endless concessions to everything that seems desirable but ends in boredom and satiety.
3. **Silence.** We need to move away from an unhealthy slavery to rumors and endless chattering, from characterless music that only makes noise, and find each day at least one-half hour of silence and a half-day each week to think about ourselves, to reflect and pray for a longer period. That may seem difficult to ask, but when you give an example of the interior peace and tranquility that result from the exercise, the young take courage and find it to be an unprecedented source of life and joy.
4. **Humility.** Do not think that it is up to us to solve the great problems of our times. Leave room for the Holy Spirit, who works better than we do and more deeply. Do not wish to stifle the Spirit in others: it is the Spirit who breathes. Rather, be sensitive to its most subtle manifestations, and for that you need silence.

May this "martini" help us in handing on the faith for this time and this place!

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