
April 5, 2009 • Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Pastor's Column

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A Lenten Reflection by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap.

Raniero Cantalamessa is a Franciscan Capuchin Catholic Priest, born in Ascoli Piceno, Italy 22 July 1934, ordained priest in 1958 and has a doctorates in Divinity and Classical Literature. He is a former Professor of History of Ancient Christianity and Director of the Department of Religious Sciences at the Catholic University of Milan, and was a member of the International Theological Commission (1975 -1981)...

In 1980 he was appointed by Pope John Paul II as "Preacher to the Papal Household" in which capacity he still serves, preaching a weekly sermon in Advent and Lent in the presence of the Pope, the cardinals, bishops and prelates of the Roman Curia, and the general superiors of religious orders...

—www.cantalamessa.org

It is just as deadly to try to forego either of the two guides of the Spirit. When the interior testimony is neglected, we easily fall into legalism and authoritarianism; when the exterior, apostolic testimony is neglected, we fall into subjectivism and fanaticism...

When everything is reduced to just the personal, private listening to the Spirit, the path is opened to a unstoppable process of division and subdivision and multiplication of denominations and sects, often contrasting each other in their essential points, demonstrates that the same Spirit of truth in speaking cannot be in all, because otherwise he would be contradicting himself...

We should recognize however that there is also the opposite risk: that of making the external and public testimony of the Spirit absolute, ignoring the internal testimony that works through the conscience enlightened by grace. In other words, it is the risk of reducing the guidance of the Paraclete to only the official magisterium of the Church, thus impoverishing the variegated action of the Holy Spirit.

In this case, the human element, organizational and institutional, can easily prevail. The passivity of the body is fostered and the doors are opened to the marginalization of the laity and the excessive clericalization of the Church.

Even in this case, as always, we should rediscover the whole, the synthesis, that is truly 'catholic.' It is the ideal of a healthy harmony between listening to what the Spirit says to me, as an individual, and what he says to the Church as a whole and through the Church to individuals.

—Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap.
Preacher of the Papal Household
Lenten Reflection
27 March 2009

Fr. Mike