

DONALD COZZENS

Renowned Priest and Author, Speaks in Naples, Florida
Submitted by Peg Bisgrove

“Small treasons are wounding the Body of Christ. We are not quite at home in church. We are feeling exiled in place; alienated. We have been disillusioned. But that is turning into wisdom”.

~

“Come back to me with all your heart, don’t let fear keep us apart;
Integrity and justice with tenderness you shall know,
Long have I waited for your coming home to me and living deeply our new life.”

The singing of these words from “Hosea” filled St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in East Naples, Florida Feb. 28th during Mass. Immediately after, at VOTF of SWFL’s National Speakers’ Forum, Fr. Donald Cozzens told us, “Small treasons are wounding the Body of Christ. We are not quite at home in church. We are feeling exiled in place; alienated. We have been disillusioned. But that is turning into wisdom”.

The great treason is the sexual abuse of children. And the small treasons are daily ways the truth gets chipped away along with integrity. Examples are plentiful in the spin that’s put on words along with denial, deflection and exaggerated deference.

How did this mess happen?

Father Cozzens said two factors contribute.

The first is that:

People are not in touch with what it means to be church. If we don’t know, groups like Voice of the Faithful will be seen as traitors. The primary reality of church is Christ in the assembly as people of God.

Secondly:

We are witnessing the unraveling of the last feudal system in the west; a system based on unquestioned loyalty, with no power and no voice. The system originally thrived largely because the people were uneducated. Vestiges of the feudal system remain today such as kissing rings of hierarchy, and titles of Excellency and Monsignor. Excommunication and censure are still practiced today.

Said Cozzens, “Loyalty, obedience and respect are necessary for the life of the church in an ordered structure, but a healthy church is authoritative, not authoritarian.”

What can we do?

“Join Voice of the Faithful!” said Fr. Cozzens. *“This is the laity’s moment.”* The laity has been called out of exile.

Very often their education exceeds that of their priests. The feudal system of superiors and inferiors keeps the church stuck in adolescence. We have an obligation to move away from that system. We need a **Consciousness of Discipleship** to change the system. This raised consciousness shows in simple ways – like being fully present as a baptized, responsible person who insists on being treated as an adult; like the perception to know when priests and pastors live in truth and integrity. Without living Redemptive Honesty, silence, denial and frustration will thrive.

How can change happen?

Fr. Cozzens insists that he does not know the particulars in the local churches, but what he does know is that, *“The Holy Spirit is loose in the world!”* We need to move closer to Pentecost than to Canon Law. We need people in authority who ring true as having lived experience of God’s love. We need less parenting and more partnership between laity and the ordained. Be brave. Act in love. Know the difference between strategy and tactics. Go to the www.votf.org website and sign the petition demanding constructive action!

Prophets with courage to speak will shake the foundation.

If we fail to listen to peoples’ experiences of discipleship, we tend to muzzle the voice of God. In the last fifty years there has been much corruption.

The church does not need fixing. It needs a new system that yearns to be invented: a system that will gather her people in partnership to celebrate the homecoming. We’re on the road.

**“Long have I waited for your coming home to me
and living deeply our new life.”**

.....

Fr. Donald Cozzens is a priest of the Cleveland Diocese. He is visiting professor of Religious Studies at John Carroll University and past President-Rector of St. Mary Seminary.

His most recent book is "Sacred Silence; Denial and the Crisis in the Church".