

The Foundation for AWAKE AND PRAY

We are living in unprecedented times in our nation. Archbishop Chaput's 2017 book, *Strangers in a Strange Land* makes the case for this emphatically. "We're passing through a religious revolution in America. For many generations a common Christian culture transcended our partisan struggles. It gave us a shared framework of behavior and belief. Now another vision for our nation's future has emerged. It sees no need for Christianity. And in many cases it views our faith as an obstacle to its ambitions. We've become, in Stanley Hauerwas's famous phrase, 'resident aliens'."

It is essential that we wake the sleeping giant – the lay faithful. Vatican II laid the foundation for change from a church that had become largely clericalized. Many Catholics today still see the church as the business of the priests and bishops rather than one defined as "the people of God" as it is described in *Lumen Gentium*. In Pope St. John Paul II's 1988 Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifidelis Laici*, he addressed the mission of the laity in the church and in the world: "A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. *It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle.* (emphasis in original)"

What is needed is not another program or strategic plan, but a deeper conversion of the laity and a call to fulfill its mission. According to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the church is an "assembly of those called out", because it 'calls out' all (people) and gathers them together." It is time to call out the laity to be the church!

Church renewal must follow the principle of subsidiarity – beginning with the grass roots renewal of its individual members. "To be sure, we are lacking in human resources and earthly power. Yet we lodge our trust in the power of God's Spirit, who was promised to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ." (From the Opening message of the Documents of Vatican II). **This requires a move from Emmaus to the Upper Room.**

- **On the road to Emmaus**, Jesus accompanied two disciples, explaining the Scriptures and opening their eyes to the necessity of Calvary and the reality of the resurrection. They joined the other disciples in Jerusalem who had also seen and touched Jesus in his risen body. At his ascension into heaven, Jesus told them to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. *Yet seeing and hearing the risen Jesus wasn't enough to overcome their fear of death.* They returned to Jerusalem and waited in daily prayer - but in a locked room for fear of being discovered.
- **In the Upper Room** the disciples experienced a baptism of fire that emboldened them to publicly give witness to their faith, empowered them to carry out Christ's commission to evangelize, and imbued them with spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ.

We need to gather together in prayer and seek an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in three ways.

- **Regular times of praise and worship** to console the Heart of Jesus including repentance and reparation for the sins of the church and the world. For “the exact opposite of sin is not virtue, but praise.” (Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, 2020)
- **Fellowship groups in homes** to develop bonds of friendship that provide encouragement, wisdom, healing, and strengthening. (*Acts 2:46 “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”*)
- **Periodic retreats** seeking empowerment in the Holy Spirit through the Eucharist, talks, discussion, and prayer ministry for individuals.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen spoke prophetically in 1974: “These are great and wonderful days in which to be alive...It is not a gloomy picture – it is a picture of the Church in the midst of increasing opposition from the world. And therefore live your lives in the full consciousness of this hour of testing, and **rally close to the heart of Christ.**” **“Behold this Heart which loves so much, yet is so little loved.”** – 17th century revelation to St. Margaret Mary.

We must rally close to the heart of Christ, even if it’s only a small contingent. God has a special place in his heart for the small, the lowly, and the poor. Salvation history is full of examples of God working through small numbers. He seems to prefer it.

Anawim: a Hebrew word from the Old Testament describing the “poor in spirit” who remained faithful to God in times of difficulty as well as in good times; also known as the **“faithful remnant”**; Mary was the first perfect Anawim.

- On that day, says the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted. The lame I will make the **remnant**, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion now and for evermore. (Micah 4: 6-7)
- The surviving **remnant** of the house of Judah shall again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards; for from Jerusalem a **remnant** shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Is. 37:31-32)
- “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not!...Do you not know what Scripture says about Elijah, how he pleaded with God against Israel? ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have torn down your altars; I alone am left and they are seeking my life.’ How does God answer him? ‘I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ Just so, in the present time there is a **remnant** chosen by the grace of God.” (Rom. 11:1-5)
- “The Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many soldiers with you for me to deliver Midian into their power, lest Israel vaunt itself against me and say, ‘My own power brought me the victory’.” (Judges 7:2) He reduced the 32,000 soldiers to 300 (less than 1%). **God is once again gathering a remnant for prayer and action.**

But what kind of prayer and action? The kind modeled for us by Abraham and Moses.

- Genesis 18: Abraham intercedes for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, and even 10.
- Psalm 106: *They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. Therefore he said he would destroy them – had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the **breach** before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them...For their sake he remembered his covenant. In the greatness of his love he relented.*
- The Hebrew word used for **breach** means a break, a rupture; to break away. But “You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to live in. (Isaiah 58:12).
- It is our call to repair the gap/breach between the Lord and those who have abandoned him, offended him or treated him with indifference. A call to console the Heart of Jesus with our praise and thanksgiving – an expression of our trust in the Lord and his plan of salvation. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because they did not recognize the time of their visitation. (Lk. 19: 41-44) He weeps now in the same way. As Blaise Pascal wrote in the 17th century: “Jesus is in agony to the end of the world. **We must not sleep** during that time.” – Pensees, 553.
- “Everyone has sufficient grounds to be afraid that he may grow weary under his burden and give in” to adversity. But this very tendency should actually cause us “to rouse ourselves and **wake up** to virtuous living”; it should make us more and more convinced of our absolute need for the habit of prayer. – St. Thomas More with comments by Gerard Wegemer.
- Lk. 21:34, 36. “Beware that your hearts **do not become drowsy**...Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”
- “Why are you sleeping? **Wake up**, and pray that you may not be subjected to the trial.” (Luke 22: 46, NAB)

AWAKE AND PRAY is not a movement, an association, a program, a strategic plan, or an institutional renewal initiative. It is a call to console the Heart of Jesus **with a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving**; to **repent for our unfaithfulness** as a church and a nation; to stand in the gap between the Lord and those who have abandoned him or chosen to ignore him, and intercede on their behalf; and to **offer ourselves as a remnant people to be used as he wishes in this spiritual battle**. There is no proscribed mission for AWAKE AND PRAY; only to be faithful to the way the Holy Spirit is uniquely working in each one’s life to fulfill the lay vocation.