

My friends in Christ, in the year of our Lord 1808, the French dictator Napoleon Bonaparte was the tyrant of mainland Europe. France having essentially destroyed itself in the godless horrors of the French Revolution some years prior, Napoleon picked up what fragments of France there *yet* still remained and made an empire; and by 1808 his empire had expanded far beyond the traditional borders of France.

And so it was that he invaded and occupied Rome. And he arrested the cardinals and, soon after, imprisoned even the pope himself, Pope Pius VII, who promptly excommunicated him (back in a forgotten age when people actually took that seriously and understood the severe ramifications of that). And upon being excommunicated, Napoleon went into a spitting rage, veritably *howling* at the pope: “You *fool!* We will destroy you!”

And how did the pope respond to this *very* real threat? Why...he started *laughing* of course!

“You say that *I* am the fool?” he replied. “Why, we have not been able to destroy *ourselves* for two thousand years! And you will not be able to do it, either.” So...good luck!

Well, we know the *rest* of the story: Napoleon is dead. His empire is gone. But the Church is *still here*.... Emperor Nero could not destroy us in the very beginning when there were only a few thousand Christians in all the world; Attila the Hun could not do it; Frederick Barbarossa *also* failed, *and* the Saracens, *and* the Tudors, *and* the Nazis, *and* the Communists – they all failed to destroy the Church (and certainly *not* for lack of trying). Nor could we even manage to destroy *ourselves* (again, not for lack of trying).... But I mention all of this because here we are, this day, in the midst of yet another crisis, yet another scandal...and it seems *very* much that, once again, we are so dead-set on trying to destroy ourselves. In-fighting amongst Church leadership. Inaction in Baltimore for the annual meeting of the American bishops. Pope Francis issuing a mandate that the bishops of our nation *do nothing* with regard to investigating the scandal and constructing a solution. And we can make of it what we will – do your own reading, your own research on the whole matter; come to your own conclusion. But in any event, it all seems yet another instance of self-destruction.

And yet, Pope Pius VII said it to Napoleon and it is absolutely true: try as we might, we just *cannot* destroy ourselves.... And *that* is very good news. We might *try* to destroy ourselves as Church and we *are* the Church, for we are the Bride of Christ, the Mystical Body of Christ. And as for Jesus Himself: *He...is invincible*. The *Church* cannot be destroyed because *Christ* cannot be destroyed. For Christ has already won! Christ is the winner; Christ is the victor; Christ is the champion; and Christ is *invincible*.... Christ is here to stay. *Viva Cristo Rey!* “Long live Christ the King!”

And Christ built the Church – His Church...*us* – on solid rock. And even “the gates of hell shall not prevail.” This was His proclamation to our patron, Saint Peter the Rock; and through that proclamation, we realize the fulfillment of the promise that Christ makes to us: “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” And the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Consider the gates. Gates are a *defensive* structure. Gates keep *out* unwanted visitors. And if the *gates* of hell shall not prevail, that means that hell’s defenses are *weak* – and it is the *Church* that is on the offensive: attacking Satan; despoiling hell itself of all efforts to steal souls from God! And it is our prayers to our Father Who art in Heaven, our friendship with Christ the King, our fellowship in the Holy Spirit, our sacred striving for virtue and holiness of life – for nothing less than *sainthood itself*.... It is all of *this* that is our battering ram, utterly *pulverizing* those flimsy gates of hell. And the sword of the Lord, the power of Christ, has already won!

But if that is true...then why do I still worry? My faith in Christ does not rise or fall, live or die because of the apparent ineptitude of *this* bishop or *that* pope or the howling anthems of a fallen broken world that tempts me with a great many shiny trinket...but on *Christ* and Him *alone*.

And yet, I still worry. But why? I worry because of my grave concern for individual souls; I observe so many people scandalized by this wretched mess, their scandal evidently beyond any hope for repair; and though the *Church* prevails...*individual souls* are at grave risk of being lost forever.

And *this* is my fear, my worry.... But even so...there *is* hope! Despite the crisis, the scandal, the warts-and-all ugliness that we the members of the Church often seem to make of ourselves, our

Parochial Year for Evangelization has proven (to *me* anyway, and *hopefully* to *you* as well) that there *is* hope, and we are already reaping the goodness of what we have tried to sow in the last year, already receiving the fruits of our labors. Consider a few stats that only *begin* to tell just *part* of our story.

We had thirty Baptisms in the last year, twenty-five children and five adults coming into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter. And we had thirty-three Confirmations in the past year, twenty-four children confirmed by Bishop Daly last spring and nine adults at Easter.

We had nine weddings last year, which possibly is about as many as any parish in this whole metro area, besides maybe the Cathedral and Saint Aloysius.

And maybe the most telling number of all: we had forty-three new parishioner households register with the parish in the last year.

But proof of the success we have enjoyed so far in our evangelization efforts can be found not *only* in the *quantity* of souls won for Christ but also in the *quality* of discipleship in each of us in our own personal pilgrimage of faith with the Lord. I have observed that the sublime richness of faith and discipleship in *each* of us *and* in *all* of us a family in faith here at Saint Peter has certainly grown rather substantially, thanks to a large extent to a great variety of parish events such as our appreciation dinner for parish volunteers that our Pastoral Council hosted this past week.

Now, of course, it can be argued that a lot of this great success as a parish is really just part of the normal year-in/year-out life cycle of the parish; for example, we *always* have people who join the Church at Easter through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults program. Be that as it may, at the same time, I think that a lot of our success truly is the fruit of our labors to evangelize during this Parochial Year for Evangelization and beyond. And we remember that we in fact *need* (not just *should*, but *need*) to evangelize (unleash the Gospel and proclaim the Good News) because we owe it as a matter of justice and charity to our brothers and sisters who, as yet, do not choose to claim the blessed name of Christian. We owe it to them for all of the earthly *and* heavenly benefits that come with being evangelized, with having the Lord brought to them and they to the Lord.... This is why

they need to be evangelized. As for us: we, in very truth, need to evangelize for the simple reason that God told us to do so; it is a divine mandate, our field commission. And it is for our salvation.

And *all* of this...for the greater glory of God...for the salvation of souls. All of it as proof of the ultimate victory of the invincible Christ Who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And the prophecy of His coming again in glory is precisely what we heard proclaimed in Sacred Scripture. The Prophet Daniel: I “heard [the] word of the Lord...there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of [God’s] people.” And from the Lord Himself in the Gospel narrative from Saint Mark: “And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory, and then He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.” The glory of the Lord’s victory.

You know, the anti-Christian, anti-Church pundits of social commentary really seem to *love* pointing out how we, the Church, are always on the quote-unquote “wrong side of history.” What with our “wrong” stance on abortion, on contraception, on gay “marriage,” or *whatever* happens to be the cause *de jour*. But in fact, we are on the side of Christ; and Christ is the *author* of history and the *champion* of the end of days, the culmination of history. And so, we are *certainly* on the *right* side of history, for we are on the side of Christ. To Him, we come; before Him, we stand. And may it be that, once again, we will fail *utterly* to destroy ourselves and instead learn more fully simply to be content to reside and, thus, remain in the Sacred Heart of our blessed Lord – Who Himself is here to stay, and His Church is here to stay.... Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever.