

Embattled Sisters

May 1, 2010

Two teaching Sisters from the same girls' school wrote to me recently, one daunted, the other hopeful. No doubt Sister Daunted is also hopeful, while Sister Hopeful is also daunted, because Catholics must close their eyes in order not to be daunted by the soft apostasy creeping up on us all, while at the same time they have to be losing their Faith if they are losing the Hope that goes with the Faith.

Sister Daunted writes, "The world's grip on our girls is tight." Absent from her own country for three years, when she came back she found, "The change in mentality of our girls is noticeable. We struggle to maintain principles and morality." Mark you, this school is surrounded and supported by Catholic parents holding to Tradition, it has a constantly rising enrolment, and many parents make serious sacrifices to ensure that their girls are taught there. Yet here is a Sister telling us from the inside of a "mentality" problem also rising.

This is because our entire Western society is falling away from God, and because man, as Aristotle said, is a social and not just an individual or familial animal. Therefore a boy or girl can have good parents, a good family, even a good school, but if the society outside home and school does not share the Catholic values striven for inside, then the boys and girls, especially from adolescence, will sense its anti-Catholic thrust, and will come under more or less severe pressure to "go with the flow." Today that pressure is severe, to the point of daunting the good Sister, because any true educator today feels like someone standing on a sea-shore and trying to stop the tide from coming in. But at least Sister has her eyes open and is not deceiving herself that the girls' schooling solves all their problems, as the girls' parents can be tempted to think.

However, no doubt she shares also the relative optimism of Sister Hopeful, who writes to me that when the girls put on a theatrical performance at school, people coming from the world "are amazed that the girls can memorize lines and lines, and also that the rest of the schoolchildren in the audience are listening and watching, and not playing with their cell-phones." She goes on, "When you hear comments like that, you realize what we do somehow manage to achieve, and you can be grateful for it."

In brief, as St Joan of Arc said, it is for us to give battle and for God to give the victory. Providence deals us all a certain hand of cards which we may not always like, but it is up to us to play it as best we can. I am reminded also of Evelyn Waugh's dauntless answer to a woman who complained of his being so nasty despite his being a Catholic. "Madam," he replied, "You have no idea how much nastier I would be if I was not Catholic. Without supernatural aid I would hardly be a human being."

Kyrie eleison.