

Infection? – Who?

August 25, 2012

A favourite proverb of mine comes from China: “The wise man blames himself, the fool blames others.” Not that others are never to blame, obviously, but that I can usually do little or nothing to change their behaviour, whereas I am at least in theory in command of my own. As the *Imitation of Christ* has it, we rarely think with profit on the sins of others, always with profit on our own.

This age-old wisdom is called to mind by the letter of a reader of “Eleison Comments” (# 263) in which she complains of the “Conciliar infection” that she observes in the way in which Society of St Pius X Tridentine Masses in the USA can be celebrated by the priests and attended by the laity. If her dark observations are summarized below, it is not in order to overwhelm priests or laity with the darkness, but to suggest how each of us can examine his own behaviour.

In general she says that the “Conciliar infection” has been creeping into the SSPX chapels for some time. She goes so far as to say that the situation is deteriorating and desperate, and the damage is already done. It is as though Latin has taken pride of place over the Faith, as though anything goes if only it is a Tridentine Mass said in Latin. Not having understood – or retained – what the Mass really is, she says, the laity find it normal merely to attend. Many attend Mass daydreaming, and then they receive Holy Communion in a very disrespectful way, just like in the Newchurch.

She blames the priests for not having sufficiently explained the Faith or the Mass. As for their sermons, she wonders at times whether they understand what they are proclaiming and at times she finds that the personal ideas of the priest and the context of the sermon as a whole come over as Conciliar. Liturgical rules are not respected, rubrics are not

consistent, the Canon of the Mass is hurried through. In brief she is not surprised if a number of SSPX priests and layfolk are ready to join the Newchurch, nay, may even already belong to it.

Now nobody in his right mind would claim that her dark description fits all SSPX Masses, but such is the corruption of our age that a deterioration of the kind she observes is all too normal. The corruption presses upon priests and laity alike, and it means that all of us need to observe closely how it may be creeping up on ourselves. As Sister Lucy of Fatima once said in the 1950's, the laity can no longer rely on the clergy to do all the work for them of getting them to Heaven. In fact they never could do so, but a lazy "obedience" is still today a common temptation. If layfolk want good priests to lead them, and if they do not want the SSPX to go Conciliar, then let them observe their own household to put it in order – for instance, how do I myself and my family attend Mass?

As for us priests, let us not forget the dire warning of the prophet Ezechiel (III, 17–21) to pastors: if the pastors tell the people how they are sinning, and the people go on sinning, the Lord God will punish the people but he will not hold the pastors responsible. Contrariwise, if the people sin and the pastors do not tell them how they are sinning, then the Lord God will hold the pastors guilty for the people's sins. "Judgment should begin at the house of God" (I Pet. IV, 17).

Therefore it depends on all of us to do what is in our power to prevent the SSPX from catching the "Conciliar infection." That is today more easily said than done, but as St Paul says (I Cor. IV, 3–5), let each of us look to his own sins. It is God who judges.

Kyrie eleison.