

Of Cops, Shepherds, and Holy Mother the Church

Lowen Clausen is a former Seattle cop who has become an author. His books – First Avenue, Second Watch, and Third & Forever (how Trinitarian!) – are filled with the experiences which were part and parcel of his life thirty years ago. He told an interviewer that

“to keep himself interested, he wrote about female police officers, because he was fascinated by the special challenges they faced. When he was a policeman, he says he was initially skeptical that women could do the job, but he quickly changed his mind. ‘They didn’t rely upon necessarily strength or force,’ he says. ‘They relied upon the position, their job, and the sort of moral authority, and that really impressed me.’” [<http://www.npr.org/2011/08/04/138957132/a-former-cop-sets-his-crime-scene-in-seattle>]

Hmmm... My mind, of course, turns to “Holy Mother, the Church”: imagine that the Church might be portrayed as a woman! Might we learn something about our own vocation as Church from these policewomen?

In case you haven’t noticed, the days of the “Church triumphant” seem to have come to an end. From a position of power in the society which seemed to include the ability to dictate to prince and pauper alike, the Church seems to have fallen below the radar in the marketplace – either to irrelevance or to scorn in the eyes of many. Gone are the days of unswerving obedience, when the “shepherd” could either lead the flock from in front as a drum major leads a parade, or from behind like a sheepdog nipping at their heels: neither prestige nor coercion seem to work any more. Imagine that the “shepherds” – and I include myself, too – might learn to lead as Jesus did: from the midst of the flock! As the Seattle cop learned from his female colleagues how to rely on more than brawn, so must we in the Church.

We are told that the policewomen of Seattle learned to rely upon their position and job. What about us? We as Church are to assume the position taken by Jesus – that is, not above and thus superior to the unwashed masses, but rather in the midst of Christ’s human family, embracing one and all as He Himself would. Our job is likewise the same as His – namely, to spread the “Gospel”, which is nothing more than the Good News of God’s Kingdom in our midst. This, of course, cannot be done merely with words: after all, the “children of God”, like all children, will not do what we say, but rather will imitate what we do. Alas, the headlines tell us that we have not always practiced what we have preached. Is it surprising, therefore, that people hesitate to listen to our words?

The policewomen acted out of a “sort of moral authority”. Imagine that we might live by the motto “Right makes might” instead of the other way around! That’s certainly not the way it works “in the world”, where headlines scream of wars and of bloodshed and of the food fight which Congress has become, where the poor and powerless in Somalia and North Korea starve because the rich and powerful – both in those countries and in the rest of the world - don’t seem to care. I was taught that the Church was to be counter-cultural in the same way that Jesus was: changing the world for the better by showing that there is a better way – namely, the law of love which is the basis of God’s Kingdom. How can we claim to be followers of Christ who are faithful to the teaching of

the Church if we neglect the social teaching of the Church which calls upon us to love one another and to care for “the least” of our brothers and sisters? (Matthew 25: 31-46) Saint Paul would say that such pseudo-Christians are nothing but noisy, clanging gongs! (1 Corinthians 13:1)

The policewomen of Seattle taught Lowen Clausen an important lesson. Perhaps we can learn something too – provided we are open to being taught. Only then can we witness to the Gospel as Christ would have us do. Now that would be impressive!

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op