

Bishop Kevin Donlon  
reporting from the conference at Gran,  
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## Reflections from an 11th Century Church

Dear Friends In Christ

Last week I was in meetings in Norway with leaders from different expressions of the catholic faith in the East and West. All lamented that the priority once given to the faith was in decline and that much of what is valued about the catholic faith from the promise of salvation in Christ Jesus to the beauty of the liturgy was increasingly lost to many in our world.

Of course there was much analysis as to how this happened from concerns about the Age of Enlightenment, to the Sexual Revolution of the 60's up to the present rise of radical Islamic fundamentalism. Perhaps these are more symptoms than the problems.

It did make me wonder as we gathered in an 11th Century Church in the Norwegian countryside, why was it that 1000 years ago this beautiful church was filled and alive. Yes it was a different day and time. No social media, no phones, movies, TV etc. What else was there to do one might ask? But perhaps that was the wrong question I thought.

As a result, for many spreading the Word of the Lord was considered both an honor and blessing. So convinced were these people that the commandment of love was the decisive reality in their lives that the care for each other becomes a manifestation of the love of God as they imitated Jesus. People are taken out of an isolation. They are no longer ostracized because they are hungry, sick, lonely, weeping.

In that beautiful church 1000 years ago there was a community that offered hope in a dark cold world that explained goodness was possible in the wake of evil. IT offered symbols that could make sense of a confusing world. It offered a moral structure for the universe and the assurance that sin and death do not have the final say in our lives. It said justice has its basis not in human judgement first but in the grace of God, finally. It offered a way forward in a world that seem to have a sense of going backward.

I then realized that 1000 years later this country church still had the beauty and grandeur of faith it was designed with. Not only did that church have it, but the story of faith it presented still was revealed there in every stone. So what was different? Could it be the people? As we are now just crossing into this millennium, we look back at the people of the first two, the persecuted Church at the beginning of the first, the emerging western culture in the second millennium, in both the Gospel triumphed. What legacy of triumph shall be ours for the faith in this the third millennium? A question for he ages perhaps, but a question that is ours nonetheless. I hope you will think and pray about it in our church in the Hillsborough Countyside.

In Christ,  
+Kevin