

## FIDELITY TO TRADITION

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*Readings: Jer. 31: 31-34 / Matt 9: 14-17*

Long ago in a remote corner of the high New Mexico desert there lived a lazy wine maker by the name of Pedro Sanchez. Pedro was well known in the nearby village for his self indulgent ways. He rarely worked and so spent most of his time talking about himself, drinking other people's wine, telling stories and playing cards. Friends often warned Pedro that one day Lady Death would arrive before he was ready and demand an accounting of his life and he would have nothing of value to report.

But Pedro paid no heed to their words until one morning in the third month of his 50th year. On that morning he had slept late after a long night of drinking and storytelling. As he stood in front of an open window scratching, stretching and breathing in big gulps of the warm, desert air, his eye caught movement on the horizon and he saw it was a figure dressed in black. To his dismay he realized it was La Dona Muerta, Lady Death and, since his nearest neighbor was a 1/2 mile away, Pedro knew that La Muerta was headed for his little shack! But Pedro had an idea and hurried into the bathroom where he shaved off his beard, his mustache and even the hair on his head. He had just finished when La Muerta knocked at the door!

"Is Pedro Sanchez here?" she asked, straining to see around him and into the dimly lit room.

"Oh, no, he is not, my Lady!" Pedro answered unsteadily. "You just missed him."

"Will he be back soon?" La Dona was clearly disappointed.

"Oh, no, most certainly not, La Dona." Pedro answered now with conviction. "He left at dawn and is now several hours on his way to Mexico City. He will not be back for months, perhaps even a year!"

Now, La Dona was troubled. In all her years of travel through the world she had never made a return trip alone and she did not want to do so now. "Indeed," she thought to herself, it was a shame that I have missed Pedro Sanchez. So I think I will take with me, instead, this bald headed man."

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\* Fran is a member of the Northern California Region and was called forth at this Assembly as Roots Keeper of the SFCC archives. The following presentation was a homily given during an Assembly liturgy.

The time had come for his accounting and Pedro was not ready. What about us? What about SFCC? Are we ready? This is the occasion of our 25th jubilee and what accounting can we give to the world should it knock at our door? Can we say we have been faithful to our tradition, our charism - "that all may be one" or would we have to admit we have been guilty of too much self indulgence?

In today's readings we are instructed that the new covenant is written in our hearts. We are encouraged to celebrate because the bridegroom is with us. We learn that we shouldn't cut up fine silk to patch old work clothes, and we are told where to store new wine. Is this list some sort of an accounting? As a gathered community are we supposed to work through these analogies and somehow find SFCC? It is easy enough to parallel our Profile with the new covenant and from there to examine our fidelity to that covenant. But frankly, I get confused by such a mixture of commands: covenants and wine, weddings and work clothes. Like Pedro Sanchez, I need to focus on just one image at a time. So let's look at the wineskin problem.

The image of the wineskin provides a timely challenge for the occasion of our 25th jubilee. The Assembly team has placed before us the themes of renewed covenant and fidelity to our tradition, to our charism. If Lillanna's charism is the seed first planted 25 years ago in the new vineyard of Vatican 11, and if the Profile is the strong vine stalk, then you and I must be the fruit of the vine. For 25 years we have carefully and tediously pruned, trimmed and shaped the growth of the grapevine that is SFCC. And now in 1995 we have a vine and a grape that would prompt any vintner to boast.

In Jesus' time, like now, the process of wine making entailed sequential labor. After the grapes were picked and crushed, the clear juice was poured into a holding vessel where it was kept for a specified time, Next it was poured into another vessel and another: seven in all. Finally it was considered to be drink fit enough to serve the king. And if you possessed a good wine, it was considered a serious offense against the law of hospitality not to offer it to friends, to guests, even to passing travelers.

Today, as then, vintners gather at wine tasting festivals and invite the world to come taste the fruit of their vines. And the people come! They come looking for fine wines to put on their own tables and serve their guests. But SFCC has yet to bring its wine to the festival. At no wine tasting festival has there been a booth where SFCC has offered the fruit of its labor to a public eager for a taste.

The first vessel that the grape juice was poured into was made of heavy green glass or dark hardwood. The juice turned dark as it began to ferment, and observers often warned the wine maker that it was going bad. But he only smiled and explained that the wine was doing just what it needed to do - changing from the inside out. Now, that first vessel was known as the "Vessel of Misunderstanding." We have been there. SFCC has spent plenty of time in the "Vessel of Misunderstanding." During that time we changed from the inside out as we defined our Profile and pruned our Proposals. But long since we have been poured from that first holding vessel into the next and the next and now we are ready for the wine festival.

Now at 25 years SFCC stands ready to make an accounting. Like Pedro Sanchez will we be caught sleeping late, scratching, and stretching? We have reached a moment of decision: do we continue only to prune, snip and shape? These are important and necessary occupations, but not our sole task. We exist not only to tend the vine, but also to produce a wine that we must extend in hospitality to a thirsty world.

Who will come to our booth at the wine festival? Who will want to taste our wine? The world as recognized in social justice issues of race and gender, of immigration and affirmative action, of discrimination and oppression will visit our booth and ask to taste our wine. Others will approach our wine table to be included in new, creative forms of membership because they thirst for a community with contemporary vision and purpose. Hopefully, in fidelity to our tradition of hospitality we will offer it to them so that "all may be one." To withhold that hospitality, to fail to be a bridge over rough waters may be for us a grievous sin.

How do we do that? We use the ATA to inform and educate one another about national and global issues. Together we create statements and sign petitions, which in turn are submitted to journals, newspapers, newsletters and diocesan papers. As local and interregional groups we do the same, not in the name of the larger SFCC community, but in the name of those gathered regionally or interregionally. We support the ministries of one another through donations, such as Clare House. Are we not ready to let the world taste SFCC? I think we are. Now is the time: these first days of August in our 25th year.

A few moments ago we renewed our Baptismal vows and renounced Satan in our life. Like Pedro Sanchez in the story, we can't afford to be caught off guard. What type of evil does SFCC need to renounce? Too much inward focusing? Reluctance to speak out as gathered groups of SFCC on gospel issues? Is Satan our failure to creatively restructure in order to account for other new forms of committed life and membership - just as 25 years ago we were a creative new form of committed life? Charism must respond to changing time and circumstance. Tradition that loses its vision withers and dies. The vine that is over pruned becomes barren. The vintner who locks away his wine in the end has nothing: neither wine nor anyone with whom to share it.

If we looked out the window right now and saw La Muerta approaching, what would be our plan of action? Would we pretend we don't exist? If we knew that this is to be SFCC's final year, how would we choose to spend it? Pretending, like Pedro Sanchez to be something we really are not? What accounting do we really want to give concerning fidelity to our charism, to our tradition? In the first reading we learned that the people of the new covenant will be known by their deeds because the law will be written in their hearts and therefore direct their every action. What is our action? What will be our action as SFCC? What do we claim as our core value? What binds us with the people of God? Discerning these answers is the challenge found in the Scripture readings. And this is the challenge that is ours for the taking in this our 25th year.