

Serial Email Messages – What’s wrong with them

Have you viewed a lovely and inspiring power point presentation or slide show sent to you by a friend only to get on the last slide something like the line which follows?

Don’t you find this so moving and inspirational? Now send it immediately to twenty of your closest friends, including the one who sent this to you, and you will be blessed beyond anything you could expect or imagine. Do it in the next two minutes and you will receive a special gift. If you don’t care then just delete it, and why am I bothering with you anyway?

I strongly dislike this trend in email messages, which seems to originate among fundamentalist Christians who tend to see things as black and white, i.e. you're either saved and gave your life to Jesus once and for all, or you're going to hell. With tyrannical and judgemental thinking like that, you tend to get “send this to as many people as I tell you or you are a schmuck....“

It's just a shame that the good intention and the beauty of the message these people compose is marred, in my view, by the serial letter approach.... which basically treats people like kids: “now do what I tell you, or else why am I bothering with you? I know what is good for you and if you don’t comply, then just stay in your abysmal ignorance and selfishness....” And so on....

Those who intrude into your space and time with an unwanted and unasked for “gift” by that very fact surrender their rights to that email message and what it contains. This is instant publishing into the public domain, which makes the slide show common property. There is no copyright claim attached to it, so you can edit the thing yourself by simply saving that file to a folder on your PC, opening up that file from inside Microsoft Power Point or similar software, going to the offensive page, and editing the text. Then you can really enjoy sending it around without a second thought, with a more respectful closing that appeals to the recipient’s freedom and generosity, but leaves no hint of obligation, like this:

I hope you enjoyed this slide show. Feel free to share it with anyone you please. May the blessing, love, and peace of God remain with you and your loved ones.

As Catholics, we have come to understand that we don't just give our life over to Christ once and for all, after which we must live a perfect life as a Christian or go to hell. They ask "Are you saved?" and "When did you give your life to Christ?" expecting these answers: Yes, on September 21st, 1967, at 10:30 in the morning, as I sat at my desk at work, and I gave my life to Christ.

Rather, we understand that like the Apostles, we do decide at some point to follow Christ, and "surrender our lives to Him", but that's not the end of the story, because of our human condition. It's not enough to say it, then I must spend the rest of my life trying to assure that every aspect of my life, thoughts, words, decisions, actions, behaviour, renunciations, commitments, fidelity, falls, getting up again, sin and repentance, and life long conversion continues to go in the same direction.

Becoming a saint is the work of a lifetime, and it is God's work in us, which He cannot do without our consent and active participation. God bless you and your family during this wonderful time of Advent preparation for the joy of Christmas, when we appreciate in an ever fresher and deeper way that Jesus has come for all of us and for me.... for each and every one of us.