



## Back to Church Sunday 25 September 2011

### Back to Church Sunday Insert #7

All of us have a certain amount of influence in our lives. Some of us have more than others, but no one has *no* influence. Back to Church Sunday is a challenge to consider what kind of an influence you exert in your networks of friends and family, and what you might do with that influence.

The growth of social network sites on the Internet has shown us something fascinating about the power and reach of our networks. People may have hundreds of friends on Facebook. To be sure, not all of them are really *friends* in the traditional sense of the word. However, all those online connections, however tenuous, represent a vast web or network, through which our influence may spread.

A few people get excited about something, and share it with their friends over the Internet: on Facebook, or even good old-fashioned email. This still happens by word of mouth, too; the Internet just makes it faster and easier. They might share their excitement with a hundred people or more, and most might ignore it. But perhaps even three or four people get excited too, and they tell three friends. And those friends tell three friends, and *they* tell three friends, and when enough people do that in a short period of time, we might say it has 'gone viral.'

There is a horizontal aspect to our influence: how many people we and our friends and colleagues know. There is also a vertical aspect: how *deep* our influence goes. Is it better to have a deep, profound influence over just a few people, or the shallowest connection to hundreds? There is a depth of influence that comes from natural means: honesty, integrity, and transparency.

But there is something deeper to Christian influence. Christian influence is a power that comes from a life lived in communion with God. It is not completely distinct from natural virtues like honesty and integrity. Without either, it is very difficult to live in communion with God, let alone exercise an influence. But natural virtues cannot, on their own, be a substitute for communion with God.

It is ironic that something so intensely personal and private should be the foundation of something as outward and public as our influence over others. But consider the humblest of people. If they have a holiness about their lives, they are far more likely to influence people, even through their humility, than the most ostentatious Pharisees, who blow a trumpet before every act of piety.

Our relationships with God are not just for us alone. As God transforms our lives, he is also reaching out to others through us. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, we see a scene in which John the Baptist happens to be in the right place at the right time. He sees Jesus passing by, and points him out to two of his disciples. It is John's influence that leads to Andrew becoming one of Jesus' first disciples, and Andrew's influence brings his brother, Simon Peter. Peter and Andrew both bring Jesus to the attention of Philip, and the influence spreads from there. John's Gospel is not so much about Jesus calling disciples as it is about disciples bringing people to Jesus.

**Someone may ask 'Why should I be a part of Back to Church Sunday? What's in it for me?' The answer to that question depends on where you think the reach and depth of your influence comes from.** Even for those who believe that influence is completely personal, the result of your own efforts and exertion, there is no greater reward than knowing that you have been a part of bringing someone else to faith, or to a deeper faith. But if you believe that God works in your life, Back to Church Sunday is a significant opportunity.

John the Baptist was not just in the right place at the right time. God had given him the influence he had at that point in his life, to begin making Jesus known to the world, beginning with two disciples. To what end has God given you your influence? Is there someone in your network of family and friends who would be ready to receive an invitation to come to church? Is it possible that *now* is the time to use that influence? Back to Church Sunday calls not just for action, but careful, prayerful action, to use the gifts God has given us to their best effect.

This week's Messenger contains a special Back to Church Sunday card. Please take it home and keep it with your calendar. Remember the date: Sunday 25 September. Even if you don't invite a friend, please do come out and help us welcome visitors to the Cathedral. Inviting and welcoming people to church is something that we try to practice every Sunday. But prayerfully consider this project, and let's make the Cathedral as open and welcoming as possible.

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Almighty God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give commandment to the Apostles that they should go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: Grant to us whom thou hast called into thy Church, a ready will to obey thy Word; and fill us with a hearty desire to make thy way known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Save the Date:  
Sunday, 25 September 2011

