

00:12 Malcolm: This is your host, Malcolm Schluenderfritz, and today my guest is Peter Land from Philadelphia.
How are you doing Peter?

00:21 Peter: I'm doing well! Thanks Malcolm, it's great to be here and join you.

00:26 Malcolm: Our topic for today is community, and especially why community is important to living the Christian life, and to spreading the Christian life. Why can't we just focus on our individual spiritual growth and on living a good Catholic life by ourselves?

00:49 Peter: Well, I think, first of all, it touches on the nature of being human and how God created us. That He created us . . . actually *who* God is in Himself as a relationship of persons, as the Holy Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit, and created humankind in his image. And therefore we are inherently relational. Relational with our God, and relational with each other; in need of other people for the fulfillment of who we are called to be, of our potential. I love that saying that "no man is an island." It seems to me that separated from the relationships we're called into, we can easily wither, like a plant without sunlight, without water; in connection with others our person can unfold . . . and grow . . . and learn, and develop, and become . . . and also experience God. To me there is a sense that we need God in order to become truly who we are, who God made us to be. So that's an initial thought.

02:21 Malcolm: Yeah, you know, it relates to what I've often thought about: how you'll hear people talking about being a "self made man," and how that's actually a ridiculous concept, because no man made himself. Even the most rugged individualist will realize that he had to have parents, had to be supported through the first few years of life; and probably not just parents, he had to have a wide community which created a stable society for him to grow up in. And then since Grace builds on nature, since in the natural world, in the physical order, we need community just to *survive*, to come to *be*, and then Grace builds on that . . . and Christ came to found a *Church*, He didn't come just as a teacher with a bunch of good ideas that individuals could pick up, he came to found an *entity*, a Church, a community, a new society that we were supposed to bring others into.

Christian community is a pretty hot topic right now. Everyone's discussing how we should do it, whether it is important; and one of the things that's often presented is that on the one hand there are the people who emphasis community, and on the other side there are the people who emphasis evangelization and outreach. So do you have any thoughts on the juxtaposition of those two concepts?

03:49 Peter: It seems to me that both of those elements ought to be tied together. And that we can't really have evangelization and outreach, or at least *adequate* evangelization, without some sense of rootedness in a community. And at least in my opinion, I think the community becomes a much more powerful communication of the witness or the point of evangelization, which is to bear witness to the saving grace and love of our God. It seems to me that that very message is manifested most clearly in a community of brothers and sisters caring for each other, loving each other; the message of salvation needs to be manifested in a living community . . . like living relationships in everyday life, not just *presented* to the world as a message, it needs to be *experienced*. I think more and more we're seeing people reflect on that necessity, of the longing and sharing life in community, and seeing that community as a witness for the message of Christianity. There's a quote, "This is how they will know that you are my disciples by the love that you have for one another."

05:40 Malcolm Yes, that's a really good point and one I've thought about a lot. There's this saying in the army "If something happens once, it is an accident. If something happens twice, it is a coincidence. If something happens three times, it is an attack!" The idea being (for the applicability to Christian community), that if the world sees somebody acting in a way that the world would consider a little usual, they'll think, "That's odd!" And if they see two people acting that way, "That's really odd!" And if there's a *bunch* of people acting that way, they might think, "What is this, this isn't just an accident, what are these people doing?" They'll be *interested*. But also that idea that the Christian message, the word of God, was not just *words*; the word of God was a *person*, an *Incarnation*, and that we have to *incarnate* the Christian message; so even beyond its utility for evangelization, (which is great), there has to be that incarnational dimension in which we *become* the Christian message, we *become* the body of Christ, especially as seen in the Eucharist . . . but it has to flow out into our lives; we in one sense are one with the message that we bring. We *become* the message. And that's a very fascinating thought. It's not that we shouldn't talk about our faith, but if it just stays at that level, no one will really listen, I think.

07:24 Peter: Right! Yeah, community can't be dismissed so easily, or the reality or witness of a community living out the Christian life and message together, can not be so easily dismissed as [can] a simple message about salvation. Because like you said, it is kind of grounding the message in reality and it gives people an opportunity to experience what we're speaking of. I think a lot of people are longing for community in the world, there's so much isolation, division, alienation, and so people are trying to find community in different ways, but I think often communities apart from Christ end up failing or falling short in a number of ways . . . I mean we're just in our nature broken, tainted by sin, and selfishness

creeps in, and people can just become jaded. And I think Christians all too often fall into that. You know, our parish communities, our churches, how often are they bearing witness to a supernatural life in their midst in which other people are welcome?

08:47 Malcolm: Yeah, that 's a really good point because I've often thought about how our churches are just "sacrament stops," really. I mean there might be a coffee and doughnut hour, but outsiders will not really feel welcomed. We were talking to a woman who had a lot of experience with evangelical communities, Protestant communities, and she said that there, when she would come into a church, she'd be greeted by somebody, they'd really try to pull her in, make her welcome, and connect her with small groups, or whatever was going on. And it wasn't . . . of course it was a really good way to grow their numbers, but it wasn't as cynical as that, it was that was how they felt it should be as well. And it *did* work to grow the community. And then on the other hand, when she did eventually become a Catholic, and when she came to a new Catholic parish, nobody greeted her, nobody tried to plug her into what was going on, there was this idea that . . . you know: you go to Mass, you worship together, and then you walk home! And I've also thought, just even on the worldly level, about our lack of community, in which one of our neighbors could be starving down the street, and we would never know. Because we wouldn't *know the neighbor* to start with, and even if we did, we wouldn't know them well enough to know they were starving. I've talked to a man who grew up in the ethnic "ghetto" communities on the East Coast, in an Italian tenement building, in which a large extended family inhabited the different floors of a tenement. And he said they were all very poor, working in the factories, but nobody was ever going to go hungry in that community. If somebody ran on hard times, they were going to be taken in and fed by somebody in the block of people. And that's just a *natural* level community, that's what everyone has always lived in. One thing I've found when I try to explain community to other people: they imagine I'm talking about a lay monastic movement. And those things can possibly be good, but I think the baseline has to be at least the level of community that natural societies tend to exhibit. We Christians are not even up to the natural level that most societies have had. And since Grace is supposed to call us a level up, how can we do that when even the natural level seems exotic and strange? Imagine interacting with your neighbors on that intense of a basis.

11:28 Peter: Right. We live in a really challenging time precisely because of the wealth that our society has amassed which allows us to live seemingly self sufficient lifestyles. I think that's a key word, "*seemingly*" because it is not actually self sufficient, we're dependent in so many ways on things outside of our control. And that goes back to an earlier point that you made, Malcolm; obviously we

come into this world through others but now we're under this illusion of sorts . . . I mean we have the capacity to be very independent, and that allows us to pick and choose our relationships at will, but relationships that are not really grounded on a common necessity . . . which is I think something that you're referring to in the history of human community. People were kind of grounded together by necessity to provide collectively for their needs. No one person, generally speaking, would just go out and build their own home and provide their own food. That would have been an aberration from the norm. It's so much easier to live fulfilling lives when many hands are involved in the very needs that we have. And here in America, and in kind of Western culture, the material needs are easily met, but that in a way isolates us from having really authentic relationships with the people down the street, because they're not necessary to us. And I think this is part of the problem with Christian communities: that when something comes up you can leave and find another church, join another small group; there's no deeper solidarity that grounds people to each other.

13:49 Malcolm: I've heard it put that choice is the opposite of culture, and that where everything is a choice, even *belonging* to a particular community, or a particular parish, becomes just another choice; and a choice can be unmade at any time. There is no commitment because there doesn't have to be. And I really think that there's an important point about having to work together to maintain a living. I've found that the best community building activity is some sort of physical work together towards some productive goal. Even though the people don't *have* to participate in this particular project, whatever it might be, the experience of working together can bridge the sort of ideological divides that might be present. The people might have nothing in common, but the shared work immediately gives them something in common that they can relate *through*. And that's an interesting point: we talked earlier about incarnation, and the oldest enemies of Christianity were the Gnostics. They believed that matter was evil, and that it was all about the spirit. And because it was all about the spirit, Christianity was all about gaining a certain kind of knowledge. A certain kind of *secret* knowledge. And we see that our religious discourse is becoming that way. It is becoming very spiritualized; you could say, oddly enough, that social media is spiritualized because the physical aspects of our lives don't affect it. People would usually not behave as terribly as they do on social media if they were working with somebody in the same environment. It just wouldn't be as likely to . . . the discourse wouldn't be as likely to go that wrong. That brings up another point: that being self sufficient in American culture is actually considered a virtue, instead of a vice; there's this idea that there is actually something *good* about not depending on other people, that there's something *wrong* in being dependent. Nobody wants to be dependent! And it is probably because American culture has this myth of the frontier: the "noble" pioneer, alone with his gun and his ax

against all the forces of nature, carving civilization out of the wild, and not “beholden” to anyone or any thing. I know in Europe it's still somewhat different, their communities have broken down to a certain degree, but there are still pockets of a different spirit. I was talking to a friend who was going to live in Rome for a year for his job, with his wife and small child, and they wanted to rent an apartment. (They'd been living in a hotel.) So he met with the owners, and the owners said, “Let's go out and have dinner, and we'll talk about it.” But they didn't! They had dinner, and they talked about everything under the sun, except the terms of a lease. And then the owner said, “I'll see you tomorrow;” leaving the conversation no farther forward than it had been. So they saw them again, and this time they went over to their house and had dinner. And again, there was a fascinating conversation about all sorts of topics, but no further mention was made of renting the apartment! And after a week of this, my friend started to get impatient. You know: when was he going to be able to sign the lease on the apartment he needed! Well, it turned out that this was how the landlord vetted tenants. You'd have to *know* them, of course, and this was not unique to this landlord, this was the way things were done! What we would consider just an economic, financial transaction was done over the course of meals and conviviality and getting to know the other person. And so eventually the landlord came around to discussing the actual terms of the lease. And that was just how things moved there; it was much slower, but much more human, and incidentally, it probably made sure that the landlord ended up with a better idea of who was actually renting his apartment, and whether they would put holes in the walls! But that wasn't the important thing: the important thing was that, in that culture, the necessity was still seen of having a certain amount of relationship. It was not considered a virtue to be isolated and autonomous.

18:14 Peter: Yeah, wow, that's a beautiful point and story, one which I really appreciate. It makes me think of friends I have who told me about his experience of just eating, simply *eating* in Italy, and how different an experience it is in comparison with how we eat in America. The focus on the evening meal in Italy was so much more relational. Food really aided this connection that was being facilitated. Like . . . there were small portions that would be brought out repeatedly over the course of a couple of hours. So people wouldn't eat a whole lot of food at any one point, but it would be like a continual appetizer; it really aided the event of coming together, aided the encounter with one another, and the purpose was enjoying time together and not getting on to “what's next.” Often I think that for us, we eat so quickly, and it's kind of like “OK what's everyone doing next,” even if we're eating together. If we're eating alone we might be OK to get our food out of the way and get on to the next part of our agenda. That's one point I had about in response to what you were speaking of. A second point is that what came to mind was St. Paul's hymn to the word of God in

Philippians: "Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped but emptied Himself and took the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men." The reason I bring this up is because of the inherently relational aspect; Jesus humbled himself, and became really entirely dependent as a human being. As a baby, you know, conceived in womb and born in poverty, born as a baby, humbly dependent on human parents, and participating in every aspect of what it means to be human. And so he presents to us a humility to be lived out that is inherently dependent, dependent on the Father for everything, for His will, for His direction, but then dependent on His own human community. So I think it's valuable that you bring up this element of humility and dependence as something that as Christians we should really reevaluate in light of the community to which we are called. You know, that it's not something to be afraid of, being dependent on each other, and to foster relationships that really include . . . an interdependence. And then finally it's just . . . and this kind of continues off the theme . . . the incarnational *reality* of the word of God, and the physicality of his life on earth, versus the increasingly virtual and technological life of our day, in which I think community can not really be fostered. You know, something you were talking about, how people are much more likely to slander a person repeatedly through social media . . . I guess because of the mode of how that can be accomplished versus when they're in relationship with them physically speaking, and how much more difficult it would be, because you could encounter the the person and all their needs and all their weakness, and how much more disheartening it might be to do something like that face to face. So I guess I'm just thinking of the technological world we increasingly find ourselves in and how it can in no way really replace the community Jesus invites others into. Even in His life, he invited people to *follow* Him and they followed Him along the roads of the Holy Land, they walked with him, they ate with him, they breathed the air with him; it touches on the point of working together, working with our hands, maintaining a life together, that requires the proximity, our bodies being connected.

23:22 Malcolm: That's a really good point, especially the idea of the humility of God, who allowed himself to be taken care of, both in his earthly life, but then, even afterwards, by making himself one of us so anything we do to our brother is done to him. He made himself able to be damaged, and he was hurt; I mean, the result of the humility of God is the crucifixion. But the flip side of that is that because He is able to be hurt He is able to be helped. We could give him something. As God, very remote . . . You know, in the Old Testament he commanded the sacrifices because it was good *for the people* to make sacrifice, but he did tell the people, "I don't need your sacrifices; do you think I eat bulls and goats? I'm not hungry!" But as a man He was hungry. He needed to be fed and cared for. And that friendship is dependent on being able to reciprocate. A certain ancient thinker posited that Man and God could never be friends because

God didn't need anything from man. Man needed everything from God . . . and so when God wanted us to be friends, the only way he could be friends with us is by making Himself "needy," in a way. Making Himself need our care, both when he was on earth and now through the Mystical Body. And then to swing back around to topic of eating as community: I don't remember who it was, but somebody said it could be considered a material sacrament. But you mentioned that in Italy eating is very different. And that reminds me of a story I read, about an environmental campaigner who went across the USA campaigning against single use coffee cups. Everyone goes and grabs their cup of coffee in a styrofoam or paper cup, and then heads off to their car or walks down the sidewalk while drinking it, and the cup ends up as trash, often as litter, but even if doesn't end up littered around, it is a waste of resources. So he was campaigning for recyclable containers for coffee and other beverages taken "to go," and for effective recycling programs to make sure they ended up recycled. Then he went and gave the same speech in Italy (in Italian, of course.) And everyone just roared with laughter, because nobody in Italy, he found out later, would ever think of going and taking their coffee in a disposable cup and drinking it while walking down the sidewalk. That was considered crazy, that was what tourist *Americans* did, and only tourist Americans! They didn't need recyclable containers because in the coffee shops they had ceramic mugs that would be washed; because you would sit around and drink your coffee while talking and being part of the local community in the coffee shop. The interesting thing about that story for me is that the issue that this man was working on didn't even *exist* because of their different way of relating to life. Because they had a life centered on community, they didn't have to worry about phasing in recyclable coffee cups. And probably many more important issues would not be a problem if we were less "detached" from one another.

26:54 Peter: Yeah, it makes me think of what Pope Francis has referred to as a "throw away culture." In America it has emerged from our very individualistic lifestyle. Everything is kind of for me, or revolves around me, and my convenience and my time, whereas you're speaking of a culture that is differently ordered, ordered relationally, and I guess towards a different type of good, a type of good in which others are involved. I think in America it's like it really gets back to this lack of community in some many different ways, and this focus on the individual. Which leads to not just a throw away culture, but our fast food culture, our focus on immediate gratification, we're lacking the joy that comes from actually having relationships of quality, and to fill that lack we need to be constantly filling it with things that bring immediate gratification but that don't last, and therefore we're drinking coffee, ten cups of it a day, as we're walking, as we're in the car; you know, we need something to keep us going, whereas perhaps in Italy or in Europe there is more of a *slowness* of life that cultivates a

quality of life. I think there's a real need to get back to . . . there's actually a movement in Italy, the Slow Food movement, . . . but food is very representative of our culture, and a lot of the things we're talking about. I know it is not the most important thing, but it does speak volumes about what we value and how we live.

29:08 Malcolm: Yes, and food in and of itself . . . just the fact of eating, even alone, it shows us that we're dependent beings. I've heard someone say that the actual purpose of fasting, in the Christian tradition, is to show you that you can't survive for very long without food; food that you gain from the external world, from the work of others, and ultimately, from the blessing of God; we're radically dependent. And you're also right in bringing up the ways in which we have to compensate ourselves for not having meaningful community and therefore in some ways for not having a meaningful life. We turn to drugs of various sorts, whether hard or soft, even just all the coffee drinking or social media use; and that brings up a point that I've thought about: that as our society becomes somewhat less able to provide a materially sufficient individualistic life, community will make a comeback, but it might be the wrong kind of community. When a culture starts to go under stress, as our culture seems to be doing, what usually proliferates are cults of various sorts, religious or not, and gangs. And cults and gangs are the evil counterparts of true community. They provide in a flawed way some of the goods of community, and when more individualistic cultures start to fail, and people need to look for security to something, they often turn to gangs and cults. I'm thinking even of something like the Jehovah's Witnesses. They tend to target people who are alone and who need community, they provide that community, and so they get this allegiance to their group from people who otherwise might have not been interested in their theology, in what they had to offer. And so if we Christians, if we Catholics, do not provide the true, Christ-centered community that we're called to do, the void *will* be filled; an individualistic culture like this can't survive for very long; but the void will be filled by very ugly things. I'm even thinking of certain kinds of political movements that have a gang-like or cult-like feel and tend to thrive in individualistic cultures as they decline.

31:50 Peter: Yeah, I think that's a great point. I think we're seeing a proliferation of quasi community in our current day. Communities that are really self-appointed or . . . we have the opportunity right now to really *choose*, continuously, the people that we surround ourselves with. Especially virtually and technologically, the people who share our own interests and likes, but it is not really an authentic community, it's a community that . . . to go back to what you mentioned before, choice is the opposite of culture, so when we're constantly choosing even the people that we want in our lives, it doesn't reflect reality. And in Christian community, I think what's beautiful is that you have people from all different walks

of life, many different backgrounds, young and old, rich and poor, different ethnicities, and you're coming into contact with people who might challenge you in various ways; we shouldn't all be of the same political mindset in a church community, or in a neighborhood! And there's just going to be various personalities that conflict, and I think it is through that messiness of community, and coming together with people on a shared system of beliefs and love for our Creator and with an intention to love one another, that I think the human person will really find much greater satisfaction and fulfillment. But it's more painful; you mentioned earlier how encounters with people can be not only challenging and difficult, but cause a lot of pain. I mean, we think of the life of Christ, and He was crucified by the very people He came to, and I think there's going to be an element of that in any authentic community; but it seems to me that it's very much in and *through* that process that we are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ, and into the love that God has called us into.

34:22 Malcolm: For one thing we shouldn't expect perfection, if we're going to set out to build community. We shouldn't be too idealistic about it. Because we will then be disappointed. I've been looking at intentional community projects, whether Christian ones or secular ones. (And as well as an individualist culture, America has generated, and always has generated, lots of intentional community attempts. For instance the writer Hawthorne was part of an intentional community that he hated after being part of it for a year.) And one problem as you touched on, is that if we surround ourselves with people "just like us", it is not really a true community; it is sort of a clique, or might eventually become something like a cult. G. K. Chesterton said that a village is broadminded and the great city is narrow minded. Because in the great city there is enough of any type of person so that they can go and join a club of people "just like them." And everyone has their separate meetings, their separate clubs. In the village, he said, you'll have one or two of each kind of person, and they will *all* have to meet at the *one* local pub, and argue it out until two in the morning. And so the city actually ends up narrowing people because of that ability to only hang around with those who are "just like them." And that brings up a really important point: if we're going to try to build community, we have to be very careful we don't just become one of those cults that we talked about earlier. And I've been wondering how to avoid it, since some Christian communities have started out with excellent intentions and became dangerous cults. And one thing I thought of that might help prevent this is to not base the community on fear, on fear of the outside. I know some community building attempts are created because the individuals involved want to surround themselves with only people who are living the Christian life like they are. They are afraid of the world, and so they want to eliminate the influence of the world as far as possible. And while it is true that our Faith has the right answer, and our world right now has the wrong answer, I think that if we set out

basing ourselves on fear, on fear of the outside world, that we will not build a healthy community. We will build one of those cliques or cults instead. Because we will end up trying to only surround ourselves with people who are just like us.

37:11 Peter: There's an excellent book I read a number of years ago called *The New Parish*. It was authored by three Christian men who had toured the country to find out where Christian communities and Christian parishes were thriving. And one of the major aspects they touched upon in the communities they found that were doing well, was this idea of local community *in the place* in which the Church was planted. That the people were grounded in the neighborhood in which they were living, and were connected to it. Not simply just with each other, but with the *other people* who were living there. The everyday folks of the neighborhood. And they mention this idea of faithful presence. That these churches were exhibiting a trait of being faithfully present to the place in which they were living, day in and day out, on a regular basis. They weren't just driving in and out like a strip mall church, or a strip mall lifestyle; these were often neighborhoods in cities, or I think small towns, in which people were coming into contact, going to the local coffee shop or pub, maybe working in community gardens together, with people who did not share their faith, but with whom they could still share life with, and collaborate on good initiatives with, and bear witness to who they were. You were just talking about fear, about how fear can keep us from coming into contact with someone who is not like us, but I think our Faith invites us, encourages us, really demands us to engage the world outside of us. And in a way in which . . . we feel the security of the Love of God, we can go forth and engage and encounter the world. But I was really struck by this message of the emerging churches that they found that were more locally rooted, and this is very much the theme we're speaking of, and I would like to continue talking about the importance of the *place* in which we live as being central to the cultivation of an authentic Christian community.

40:00 Malcolm: Yes, I would say, just as a piece of practical advice, that if a community building attempt involves a lot of people moving across the country to build it, it is almost certainly going to be a disaster. I've experienced that in my own life, I've read about others who have experienced it, and it doesn't really matter if it's a hippy commune or a Catholic model village, there is going to be trouble, almost certainly, because your very first action is a symptom of our rootless culture, of our ability to choose whatever we want. And starting out from that sort of pride will almost guarantee the eventual failure of the community. The lucky ones are the ones that just fall apart, the unlucky ones are the ones that turn into cults. And this reminds me; a few years back I was lamenting the lack of local community and the difficulty of building a community to this old hippy that I know. And in many ways he's pretty crazy, but this time, he really said something

interesting: he said, "Look around you, you live in a community *right now*." And then he said, "It might be a pretty dysfunctional one, but it is still a community." Ever after that I've kept that idea, because I tend . . . you know, to disparage the suburban setting in which I live, and all the structural problems with it, and all the flawed viewpoints of the people who live in it, and that's all true, and they all need to be addressed: but if I forget that nonetheless *this* community, dysfunctional as it is, is the one I'm currently living in, the one I'm called to go on mission *to*, I'll miss the boat. I won't end up achieving what I want to achieve.

41:57 Peter: Yes, Malcolm, I think that's such a great point, community begins at home. *Where we are*. Because it's not something simply external; it needs to develop from within, it needs to be an attitude that we cultivate, almost a virtue . . . like community grows out of a virtue in which we are open to relationship, in which we engage others . . . I mean I think about when I visit home, my parents; they live in a suburban neighborhood. Connections are formed when I walk through the neighborhood, and say hello to people, and sometimes people are walking and we stop and have a little connection, and share how life has been, and what kind of dog they have, and get to know them just a little bit, and when that happens on a regular basis, I'm forming a *connection* that is building something. And maybe before long (and this has happened) people will invite the other over to their house for a meal, for a drink, for a greater moment of intimacy. And I think about in the suburban landscape too (because a lot of us are living in that type of setting) that there are a lot of opportunities to cultivate community. Like I think of the local library near my parent's house. There are events and activities and groups meeting there throughout the week (pre-COVID, of course): a philosophers' group, a knitters' group, events regularly that people would host, a mothers' group and children; you know, there are places, public places, to get involved . . . and then of course there are the public parks! For me there's a need to develop relationship, authentic relationships and friendships . . . it's almost like before we can get to a place of actual community, we need to actually find *friends*. To do life with, to share life with, and not become a clique, but become open to befriending people around us, on our streets, in our neighborhoods, in the public places that we can all visit.

44:21 Malcolm: That's so important, and there's a tension in it that we need to preserve; we can't eliminate the tension by going to one side or the other. So on the one hand, we're called to really radically live the faith in such a way that the surrounding world will probably think we're strange: we have to really live the Gospel as it is. On the other hand, we can't ignore the people who don't, whether they are fellow Catholics who are not living out the fullness of the Faith, or non-Catholics around us, and *they* have to have a place in our community. The hope

would be, the unrealistic hope perhaps, but the hope would be that eventually everyone in our local community would be living out the Gospel message. But the *first* step has to be being there for them, in a community. Because we talked about fear a little earlier and how if a community starts out in fear of the outside, it will probably become a cult, if it ever succeeds at all. And I'm thinking about the early Christians. Christ didn't come and found monasteries, places where people escape the world, He came and founded a missionary society that went out to the world. And that world was going to kill almost every one of them [the disciples]. And even so, even at that extreme of hostility from the world, they couldn't react in fear. You know, they could have went and lived in caves around the Dead Sea or something and had a happy life reading their texts and having interesting discussions with one another, and probably nobody would have ever bothered them; (They certainly wouldn't have got martyred for doing that!) but that wasn't what they were called to do. And monasticism, (which is an important part of Christianity,) developed later, once the world was *already* Christianized. I think people often forget that when Benedict went out and founded his monastery, the Roman Empire had been largely Christianized. There were still pagans around, but Christians were the majority, Christians weren't going to be persecuted any more, (unless they eventually started persecuting one another, which of course had already started to happen with the Arians, but they weren't going to be persecuted by a hostile pagan world any more) and that was when Benedict went out and founded Western Monasticism, as an outgrowth of an already *Christianized* culture. But we live in something a lot more akin to the *earlier* early Church in which the world is hostile, the world doesn't understand us. And we could just go away and build monasteries or lay monasteries or quasi-monastic institutions, and hope that the world comes and knocks at our door to find out what it is all about, but that's very unrealistic, that's never how the faith was spread historically, whether in modern mission countries or there in the early Church, it was spread by those who did not live out of fear. Who lived out out of love for all those people who may be objectively making the wrong decisions—but the early Christians, the modern missionary, loves those people none the less, and goes and lives *with* them.

47:38 Peter: Yeah, this for me brings up a theme that will probably become an ongoing part of our conversation, and that's the balance between engagement with the world, alongside the internal structure and integrity of community life. It seems to go back to your earlier point about St. Benedict: he was sent to Rome by his family to study. And while it may have been . . . Christianity was obviously introduced and had been alive in Rome for centuries at that point, but he was horrified at the culture that he found there, the immorality, the debauchery; it was a really a *dying* culture, a *dying Christian culture*, and he left Rome and left the academic circle he found himself in, (according the biography) to save his soul,

to seek salvation; he never really intended to found a monastic community, he actually began living as a hermit, and other hermits were in the area, and they were attracted to him, and ultimately community developed *out of* this desire to seek salvation. I only bring that up because there is this need, I think, to recover the reality of the dangers of the world in which we live, and not succumbing to what seems normal and acceptable around us. You know, the kind of Western Cultural lifestyle . . . and that's why I just referenced this tension between engagement in the world and internal integrity. Because we need to develop a personal life, (and also collectively) that tends to reinforce our communion with Christ, our life of prayer, a life of virtue, a life of service, and worldly influences can distract us from that to such a degree that really we are not offering people a message because we end up living the same life that everybody else lives. So people find themselves wondering, "Why would I join, what is it about you that makes me want to join the Church? Or this message that you might be proclaiming, it sounds good, but what's the reality of it? Where's the power of it?" It is something that St. Paul speaks of: "The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, . . . but a matter of power." So I think that's an important distinction: while we are called to engage and to be part of the world around us, I think we're living in a time in which certain monastic principles would be really valuable to recover, and this need to actually have some kind of *separation*, not physically speaking, but internally, from the influences and the elements of the world.

51:15 Malcolm: Very true, and it is a hard thing to figure out how to keep both principles. I think one thing that's helped me . . . in my experience there's two views of monasticism prevalent in the Church. And one is that the monk is the man who wants to *protect* himself from the corrupting influences in the world, and the other understanding is that the monk is the one who wants to give up the *good* things of the world for love of God, as a sacrifice. And they are both valid, and they have both been there from the very start. I think, though, that one of the keys to getting a healthy monasticism, (and this is pretty presumptions of me since I'm not a monk) but certainly if we're going to borrow from monasticism to structure our communities, the aspect oriented towards *love* has to predominate. The other aspect will be there, but it has to be secondary, because if we see ourselves as acting out of a love for God and for our neighbor, (whether the other members of the community or those outside the community) then the healthy fear, like the fear of the Lord, will be able to take its proper place. But if the *fear* is the dominant aspect, the love probably will not hold up.

52:41 Peter: Yeah; no I think that's a great point that love needs to be the dominant principle. It's not an either or situation in which it's just one or the other, because love invites . . . when love is dominant it invites us to a healthy

renunciation, a healthy separation at times, for a greater good. Kind of like one of the versions of being a monk that you spoke of, sacrificing things that are legitimate goods for a greater good. And love can appear to be foolish, as St. Paul says, it draws us out of ourselves and leaves certain things behind. And I think that was the point I was really trying to get at: that as a Christian people, if we're really seeking to follow Christ and spending time in communion with His love, other things will not only become secondary, but will begin to just drop away from our lives: worldly influences, worldly attachments. But there is a place too, of actually *renouncing* those things so that we can experience God's love in a greater way, and become more faithful to his commands . . . inherently in faith is this element of obedience. And in love. Faith and love require this total submission of ourselves; and Jesus not only preached a renunciation of certain things, but He *lived* it . . . you know, He and His apostles, and His disciples, and the early Christian community that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles. So that's something I'm thinking about that needs to be talked about, because in most parishes, people are rarely challenged to give up worldly things, and worldly ways, and the things of the world, and embrace a simple life, a life of *poverty* in a certain way, (maybe that's too loaded of word to use right now!) a simple life, a life that doesn't include a lot of entertainment, but focuses on cultivating new ways of being in relationship with the world around us.

55:30 Malcolm: As far as building a community, a priest I know said it's like this: in a building, you need a foundation of a Christian identity, because without a foundation, the building will not stand up; but if there is no *door* to the building, you may as well not put it up, because nobody will be able to get in; and that [door is] outreach to the world. And without either of the elements . . . the foundation may be more important in the *ultimate* sense, since a building can stand up without a door, but without a door, the *meaning* of the building is lost. I thought that was a really good way to put the relation between the two.

56:10 Peter: That's beautiful, because it makes me think of our churches right now as churches with *locked doors*; closed and locked to the outside world, even actually to their own communities, to their own parishioners and congregations. Our churches are generally locked throughout the day, open for specific services on the weekend, but how can there be any intimacy or community when the building in which that happens is closed, locked and unoccupied . . . except for the Blessed Sacrament, which is inherently relational!

56:55 Malcolm: Peter, that's a perfect illustration of how dysfunctional our society currently is! And that's also probably a good place to end this episode, because in our next episode we'll tackle the really big question: what can we do to remedy this state of affairs?

Thanks so much for joining me today!

57:16 Peter: Thank you, Malcolm, it was a pleasure!