

Chaplain's Bulletin September 18, 2022



Dear Folks,

I think it is safe to say we are going through transition. The shortage of priests is getting people's attention, but also the fact that most people who were raised Catholic are not practicing the Catholic faith, even minimally, in any measurable way. Our society is getting more and more hostile to some core Christian values, and we don't know how far that will go (there is no natural limit).

People point to various reasons why people leave the Church, but we must always remember the other side of that question: they were not given enough reason to stay. If you take away one thought from me today, let it be this:

Many, many people think the Catholic faith is much less than it is, and it doesn't take much to get them to leave because they don't think it matters that much anyway. Now there have been generations who were taught that way, and we are seeing the results. If they had a semi-decent appreciation of the awesome gift of the Catholic faith, for the magnificent and unique gift of the Eucharist, you couldn't pry them loose with a crowbar. Turning that around is a central factor in setting the course for our future.

As we seek to fix this, there is a challenge. There is polarization in the Church, and that is a major problem. I think Satan laughs himself silly every time he can get Christians fighting Christians, and he has had much cause to laugh of late. To reduce some complex issues to simple categories, we can speak of traditionalists and progressives, each with a different set of emphases and priorities. This is often coming up in how people think we should celebrate Mass.

Before Vatican II, there was tremendous emphasis on the other-worldly nature of the Mass, on reverence, on how is was unique and transcendent it was. The problem was that people often had a sense of being disconnected from it, even while present. After Vatican II, there were a number of changes, not all of them called for by the council. There was a greater sense of the importance of participating, on the community dimension, on making the mystery easily accessible. The problem was that some people often thought of the Mass as just another gathering, to be judged according to how it makes us feel and what kind of experience they have.

Coming off the lock-down, many are saying they have decided they like to do their Sunday morning prayers in their jammies in their beanbag chair with their hot chocolate. The big tragedy is not that they have stopped coming, but that they had so little sense about this in the first place.

We need to connect people as powerfully as possible with the divine mystery, a key component is how we celebrate Mass. Vatican II did teach that people should be taught to understand really well what is happening and why, and encouraged to full, conscious, active participation. The council also said that people should be able to sing or say at least those parts of the Mass that pertain to them. This does a number of things. It helps set apart the liturgy from other activities: Folks, this is different from everything else we do, and we must be conscious of that. That is part of having a sense of the sacred. It requires more effort to learn and understand, and there is merit in that. It also unites us with people all over the world. If people are gathered from other countries with other languages, we can all pray together. Even if that doesn't happen to us on a regular basis, it reminds us that Church is much larger than us and helps us put ourselves in perspective. We also focus on music that is different from secular music, that is faithful to what is being celebrated, and

pulls something from deep inside us.

Some people are unhappy because we are being more traditional. Some people are unhappy because we are not being much more traditional. One thing is fairly certain: we will not get through this without dealing with things we don't like. I think that's part of why God calls us to be Church: this is about something larger than us.

The adventure continues.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim