

Chaplain's Bulletin August 25, 2024



Dear Folks,

This Sunday we finish chapter 6 of the Gospel of John, and we see many of Jesus' followers leaving Him and going back to their former ways of life. Imagine Jesus' heartbreak watching them go. Imagine what He is feeling as He asks the twelve if they want to leave also. Peter gives a less than enthusiastic response, but they stay. They probably had as much trouble with what He had said as the others did and had as much reason to leave, but their reason to stay was stronger.

We have been reading, and hearing, and talking for many years about people leaving the practice of the Catholic faith. Many people immediately talk about bad experiences that spark their leaving. I think this is the wrong focus. There have always been bad experiences of Church, and while we want to try to minimize them, they will always be a part of life in any community.

The Church is full of sinners. It has been from the beginning. When He called the first disciples, He knew they were flawed. He warned us that it would be an issue until the end of time (See the parable of the wheat and the weeds Matthew 13:24-30).

I suggest so many have been leaving because they haven't been taught enough about the faith to give them enough reason to stay, so it doesn't take much to get them to leave. I have talked to lots (and lots) of Catholics, and a great many of them were taught a very feeble understanding about the Catholic faith. I've thought many times, "If that's what I thought the faith was, I would have left too." Some believed that it's basically a general encouragement to be a nice person. I've asked people, "Why is it a good thing to be a practicing Catholic Christian?" and some have no answer. Some say they get a good feeling on Sunday morning. Some people were actually taught they didn't need to go to church, and if they felt closer to God in the woods, that's where they should go instead (as if closeness to God were a feeling. Where did that idea come from?).

I have witnessed and experienced many kinds of toxic church. I'm still here because I believe that the Catholic faith is the truth, and that living that faith is the core purpose of life. As long as I believe that, you folks are stuck with me.

This is why I'm such a fanatic about people continuing to learn about the faith. I have calmed down enough not to be as obnoxious about it as I used to be, but I'm still just as determined. Our Church is being tested and will be tested further (Can anyone look at what is happening in the world and what is happening in the Church and not believe that?). I suggest we shall have many occasions to say, "this is a hard saying," and "this is a hard situation," and feel tempted to leave. If God is testing us, are we prepared? Is our faith deep enough, wide enough and strong enough to endure?

I propose two things: First, spend time with God (always a good thing). Second, explore more about the great treasure of our faith. The more I learn the more amazing I find it. God will give us what we need if we are willing to receive it.

Blessings,
Fr. Jim