

Pastor's Pen: Beyond a Cultural Catholicism Part 2

A cultural Catholic is one who claims the title 'Catholic' without any or little discernable practice of the faith. We live in a highly subjective culture where it is the norm to redefine reality and institutions to whatever is comfortable to our feelings. It is called the tyranny of relativism. It at such ridiculous level that now we simply state our gender without any biological and scientific evidence to prove it! If we do this with science, how much more will we with other things? However, reality does not bend to feelings. If we are to seek the benefits of a faith, then that faith does have the right and duty to set forth what constitutes being a member of that faith.

The Catholic faith does that. The minimal level of what constitutes a Catholic in good standing are what we call the precepts of the Church. Again, these are the minimum. They all presuppose that one has been baptized. Baptism opens the door. What comes after that, it could be said, are the benefits of membership. As a pastor of souls, I would be neglectful if I did not hold people to these standards set by the Church. It is not that I am setting up hoops for you to jump through, but looking for those defining factors that tell me you wish to be a Catholic in more than name only. As a pastor of souls, I will allow you to make your choice, but I will afford the consequences of those choices.

In the diocese of Jefferson City, benefits include tuition-free parochial school for parishioners. This benefit is given in order to make of greater availability an education which will build up the Catholic knowledge and identity of the faith. It is presumed that the parents and parish are partners in this task. One of the sadder developments in most every place with a school is that what parents are looking for is a free, private education. This breeds confusion in the minds of the children as they see two entities in their lives saying different things. They are left with the choice of either dismissing the authority of their parents or dismissing the authority of their Church (which is what happens). This is how cultural Catholicism is bred in our own schools. As a pastor of souls, I mean to end this here and now. I will force people to choose sides for the good of the children we hope to form. My criteria for what constitutes a Catholic in good standing will be the Church's criteria. I do not do this with the hope of throwing one person out, but in drawing people into a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church. I do with the hope of creating students who will be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

First Precept: Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

This precept of the Church cuts to the heart of who we are as Catholics. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324). To willfully neglect Sunday Mass is grave matter. It is mortally sinful. It severs the relationship between the person and God. There are parties exempt from this: the home-bound, those who are in nursing homes and hospitals, those who are ill, and those who care for them. I am aware there are certain jobs that make this difficult. The overwhelming majority of those who simply blow off Mass do not fit into these categories. They have developed an ungodly habit that they pass as a cancer to their children. This must stop for the good of all parties involved.

Why is this a precept? It is easy to see this as a hoop to jump through. I understand and appreciate that most people resent the idea of jumping through hoops. I do not want you to see Mass a hoop to jump through. Quite to the contrary!! I want you to open your heart and mind as to why Mass is so important.

Here is what we believe in a nutshell:

-We believe that on the night before He died, Jesus offered up His Body and Blood to seal a new covenant between God and humanity. We believe He did this to re-establish a relationship lost through sin.

-We believe that Jesus said we must eat His Flesh and drink His Blood so that we may have life within us. (John 6:53). We understand this to flow from the belief that to receive the benefits of a peace/sin offering (like the Passover), one had to eat of the flesh of what was sacrificed or sprinkled with its blood. We believe that this concretely shows God's desire to be literally part of our lives.

-We believe that the bread and wine do become the Body and Blood of Christ because Jesus Himself said they do. Every Mass is a direct participation in this offering of Christ. To believe otherwise is to call Jesus a liar.

-We believe that worship of Christ is necessary to the development of a relationship with Christ. To say I do not want or need a relationship with Christ is to consign oneself by one's own hand to hell. To say I want a relationship with Christ, but only on terms that I am comfortable with is to make oneself Jesus' superior. That is idolatry. The greater, not the lesser, sets the terms of relationship.

-We believe that rejection of Mass is a rejection of the Jesus who instituted it for our good. I am amazed that people want heaven but cannot bear the 'burden' of worship of Christ once a week on Sunday.

To give...not to be entertained

One of the greatest objections to going to Mass is that it is boring; I get nothing out of it. Let us start with two things: First, the Body and Blood of Christ are not nothing, they are everything. Second, if this is the attitude, then no wonder cultural Catholicism exists.

We come to Mass primarily to give! We come to give God thanksgiving and glory. We give in the way He asks for. The Mass is not a forum for entertainment and a passive looking on of a play. If my primary expectation is 'what I get out of it,' then we come with a closed and selfish heart. That closed heart will be blind to what is given to him or her in the Body and Blood of Christ. They will see it as meaningless trinket.

The point of Mass is twofold: the glorification of God and sanctification of humanity. We come to give glory to God and He, in turn, makes us holy by inserting His very Flesh into our bodies so as to make us one. It is a both/and, not an either/or. If we feel nothing, it is because we gave little to nothing. One of the reasons I am trying to move Mass away from an entertainment experience is so as to point everything in the direction it should be heading. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the regulations regarding Mass, wants us to understand we are coming into the presence of Jesus Christ and our first response is to be in worship and awe.