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Keeping Our Catholic Youth Catholic

SEP 10

Posted by [Brian Williams -Liturgy Guy](#)



(<https://liturgyguy.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/lifeteenmass2.jpg>)

Earlier today blogger [Taylor Marshall](http://taylormarshall.com/2013/09/80-catholic-youth-leave-the-church.html) wrote (<http://taylormarshall.com/2013/09/80-catholic-youth-leave-the-church.html>) about Catholic youth who are leaving the Church in droves by the time they reach their twenties. The data comes from author Sherry Weddell's book *Forming Intentional Disciples* (*Our Sunday Visitor*, 2012). While Dr. Marshall incorrectly states that upwards of 80% of ALL Catholics will leave the Church by the age of 23, the actual data (which comes from the Pew Forum Religious

Landscape Survey from 2008) is still quite sobering. What the Pew survey did reveal is that 79% of those cradle Catholics **who eventually leave** the Church will do so by the age 23. The same study also found that an astonishing 1 in 10 Americans are **ex-Catholics**, practically a denomination unto itself.

Many Catholics are fully aware of this tragic trend, if not specifically then at least intuitively. There is an ever growing industry within the Church of very clever folks, clergy and laity alike, who spend a great deal of time and energy advising us how we will stop the bleeding of this ecclesial wound and then, hopefully, reverse the tide. As I have blogged about before this polling and marketing approach is completely missing the point; as is the recent approach touted by others, such as the book *Rebuilt* (Ave Maria Press, 2013), which suggests that Catholic parishes incorporate the style and “substance” of popular evangelical mega churches to attract new parishioners.

Are You Ready for Some Football?

As the **National Football League** has just begun the 2013/14 season, I would like to employ a football analogy. Many in the Church today are like those NFL owners who observe a stadium of empty seats and lackluster fans and start devising creative ways to recapture the fan base. Is it the halftime activities? Maybe the cheerleaders? Not enough promotional give aways? All is considered except the actual product on the field. The real issue is simply this: is the team a winner? Fans turnout to support a winning team that plays real football. Winning football. Style, no matter how creative and “new”, is not going to compensate for a losing team. When a team wins games the fans ultimately turn out.

In the NFL, a winning team is one that plays fundamentally sound football: ball control and defense. Run the ball well when you need to, don't turn the ball over, and play solid defense for four quarters. Do these basics well and your team will win a majority of the time. **So, what is “fundamentally sound” Catholicism?**

The Most Beautiful Thing This Side of Heaven

Reverent and sacred liturgy. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered reverently. Beauty and a sense of the transcendent and sacred within the liturgy. Offer the Mass in a manner consistent with a faith tradition which has endured for two millennium, surviving apostasy and heresies of various kinds. Offer a liturgy that shows the faithful, particularly our youth, that Jesus Christ is actually, really and truly present in the Eucharist.

If we as the Body of Christ, the People of God, treat the Blessed Sacrament like it's just a piece of bread, then our youth will see it as just that. If we treat the Holy Mass as a rock concert featuring Protestant praise and worship music from the 1990's, then our youth will simply go to where the “entertainment factor” is superior. It is interesting to note here that the same 2008 Pew Survey also found that, just like the overall population, 10 percent of today's Protestants are former Catholics. This shouldn't be surprising to any of us.

Catechesis is integral as well. Catholics will leave the faith if they do not understand what they have. How many people would walk away from the Eucharist if they truly understood the Real Presence? How many would be “seeking Jesus” in other communities if they understood that He is waiting for them in the tabernacle?

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi

However, the very best catechesis is either reinforced by beautiful liturgy or contradicted by irreverence. So many of our Catholic youth have seen the sacred replaced by the profane as every effort is made to make the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass into something cozy and casual; something cool and fun. T-shirts and shorts, loud and interactive, more like an assembly or pep rally.

What our Catholic youth may not know intellectually regarding liturgical worship, they understand instinctively. If the Mass doesn't "ring true" to them, they will fall away; and they have for several decades. If only 30 percent of those raised Catholic still practice their faith, then we have an **obligation** to unflinchingly tackle this problem head on!

What I write about here at **Liturgy Guy** is directly related to this contemporary crisis. As a father of five children who is also blessed to belong to a thriving, traditional, parish I have personally witnessed the faith "working" in peoples lives. The Mass matters. How we worship is how we believe. **Lex orandi, lex credendi.**

Posted on September 10, 2013, in [life](#), [liturgy](#) and tagged [Catholic youth](#), [ex catholics](#), [Life teen](#), [pew survey catholics](#), [Sherry Weddell](#), [Taylor Marshall](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#). [11 Comments](#).

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DRE | September 12, 2013 at 2:09 pm

My screen name is an abbreviation of my job title. I also, couple this with youth ministry so I get a good look at educating youth and trying to get them to come to church after they graduated High School. I've been doing this for a little for two years now and here are some of my observations. We are fortunate to have a great priest, great Mass (Novus Ordo, properly celebrated), and I took over what was and still is a thriving youth program, and religious education program (we do not have a Catholic School.)

I have a 50/50 group of homeschoolers and public school kids and this seems to be the rate at which they continue to go to Mass after 18 years of age. The parents and the child's home life are the best predictors of a child continuing to practice their faith ardently into adulthood. Our youth group is centered upon the Holy Eucharist and we pray monthly at the Abortion Mill. We partake in Holy Hours and regular confession is offered to the youth. Marian devotion is promoted and all these "real Catholic" devotions are very helpful in not just instructing the mind but also the will . Unfortunately, I have seen what I thought were sound catholic youth, turn 18 and immediately head for atheism, agnosticism, evangelicalism, and in one case Mormon, now she is a Wiccan.

Seriously, not just 3 months removed from emotional conversions at youth conferences are some youth thumbing their nose to Christ and His Church; so what gives? My opinion and my experience is that youth rallies and conferences attempt to hit an emotional nerve of tears and hugs to neighbors (sometimes I have to step in and say "young man get off her, stand on your own two feet.") these

flooding emotions quickly dry up and the following week at school they are hit with the reality that though they feel changed the world is not, and I suppose out of fear and the need to fit in they quickly extinguish the hopeful zeal that lasted for one to two weeks. We forget about Grace, emotions come and go and it is dangerous to believe that a tearful experience at a conference the 17 year old will be convinced of his/her Faith when he/she is 18. Grace is substantial and overcomes the traps of the world. Grace, not emotion, endures through the difficult moments of life, the only place to receive sanctifying grace is the Sacraments.

Sacraments, Sacraments, Sacraments.... youth that go to confession monthly (at least) and show great reverence for the Holy Sacrament will continue to practice and grow in the faith. Also, I've noticed that some youth only come out for big events that more than likely will have emotional highs but skip Holy Hours where adoration and confession is available because they are "boring."

My spiritual director made it very clear to me when I took this job over that the youth are not a separate entity apart from the rest of the parish. They are apart of the parish, and having youth receiving the program beyond 18 is not your goal. They should be a contributing member of the parish when you are done with them, and not lost in perennial adolescence where entertainment is paramount. Speak often and train them in a virtuous life, heck, mention the virtues for a change. Youthful zeal needs to be directed toward heroic virtue, and speak honestly about the difficulties of living a lifestyle that flies in the face of rest of the world. Become a Saint! This is our motto.

Music, comedians and shoulder-to-shoulder swaying are fine in themselves but they are not the centerpiece of our Faith, Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament is, and if your program or event does not draw from the very well-spring of grace and life then soon your program will dry up, because it is built upon personality rather than the beautiful truth and tradition of our Church. Besides my personality just isn't that good

liturgy guy | September 12, 2013 at 11:37 pm

Thank you for sharing. I find your comment to be incredibly insightful and profound. I completely agree with you that too often people mistake emotion for something deeper. It is not. A moving retreat is not an indicator of maturing faith. I have seen this at the adult level with men, like myself, who have made a Cursillo. Great emotions but often fleeting. I saw this with my oldest daughter years ago in the youth program she was in. Your assessment of the need for grace instead of emotion is spot on. It is the Sacraments. It is the liturgy.

Please keep sharing these perceptive comments! God bless!

ykcpeggy | February 27, 2015 at 11:36 am

You hit the nail on the head. I have seen this in our local "Catholic" high school. The kids go on a great retreat with the high school and the "high" lasts about 2 weeks. Satan goes after the kids with a vengeance and they fall harder than ever. The problem arises when they have to face reality back at school. They have a very strong retreat director but the school itself is failing the kids with their faith formation. Hard to stay strong when you go to a Catholic school where it's not cool to be Catholic.

discipleofChrist | September 14, 2013 at 6:39 am

I am surprised by how few Catholics really understand that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus. I don't know if they just didn't grasp it as youth growing up, or if they came into the Church later and did not receive adequate catechesis. As a result, I try to make it a point to tell my friends both Catholic and non-Catholic that Jesus is truly present on earth and that He should

be the center of our worship. I wrote a blog about this and it is at <http://whybecatholicblog.wordpress.com/category/jesus-is-here/> It is not about the entertainment factor, but about Him.

liturgy guy | September 14, 2013 at 9:28 pm

Couldn't agree more. The decline in the belief of our Lord's Real Presence in the Eucharist is (I believe) two fold: poor catechesis and poor liturgy. First, don't teach it clearly and consistently, and second, worship as if the Mass is about all of us and not about Him. Do that for two generations and you have the Church today. Thankfully our Lord has blessed us with a new generation of priests and bishops who understand this and are correcting it.

God bless and thank you for your comment. I will be checking out your blog post on this topic.

excatholic | February 18, 2014 at 9:40 am

The biggest thing: Keep your Catholic schools and institutions Catholic. Catholic schools, in many areas are the least bit Catholic, and the same goes for its organizations, such as Catholic Charities. Catholic schools have embraced secular texts, Common Core and government funds. The last Catholic school I worked for had a principal was divorced and attended a Pentecostal church, and had some serious sin. A neighboring Catholic school had a teacher who had an affair with a married man, and got promoted to principal. Instead of Matt Maher, Catholic schools play Lady Gaga over loud speakers. As an education professional, I want a Christian environment. I could not find the Christian environment in Catholic schools, I left. I found it in Protestant schools, so I left the Church.

<http://www.photoshopguide365.com/> | May 15, 2014 at 1:08 pm

Have you ever thought about writing an ebook or guest authoring on other sites?

I have a blog based on the same topics you discuss

and would love to have you share some stories/information. I

know my subscribers would appreciate your work. If you're even remotely interested, feel free to send me an e mail.

Wilfredo | June 6, 2014 at 12:11 pm

I am really loving the theme/design of your weblog.

Do you ever run into any browser compatibility problems?

A couple of my blog readers have complained about my website not working correctly in Explorer but looks great in Opera.

Do you have any suggestions to help fix this problem?

best-Black-Hairstyles.com | June 15, 2014 at 4:02 am

Simply wish to say your article is as surprising.

The clarity for your publish is simply great and that i can suppose

you're knowledgeable in this subject. Well along with your permission allow me to take hold of your RSS feed to keep updated with forthcoming post.

Thanks a million and please carry on the gratifying work.

bigfamilyentnc | February 26, 2015 at 9:00 pm

I wish that I had understood this so many years ago when heading a youth group. It is indeed correct and while we aren't regular Latin Mass attendees we did pray and look carefully for an orthodox parish when we moved because we knew we wanted better for our kids.

JohnPaul | February 1, 2016 at 8:10 pm

Here is a heartfelt letter I have written to brothers and sisters from many Christian traditions. I write it as a convert to the Roman Catholic Church. I would be interested to hear people's thoughts.....

Greetings brothers and sisters! I hope my e-mail finds all of you well and entering this new calendar year with hope and joy! I am grateful for each one of you!

For those of you who don't know the good news, my parish school, has hired me as PT Music Minister for their students. I am working with students as young as 4 years old all the way up to 8th graders. Quite a spectrum. I've been at it for three weeks! I cannot thank God enough for this AWESOME and AMAZING opportunity! I am having the time of my life. My greatest desire is to see the kids know and experience how much God loves them and for them to fall more in love with Jesus and His Church through music. Nothing could bring me greater joy!

JUST this week I read parts of a pastoral letter by a Bishop of a city in the Midwest region of the US. It is about music and the use of music in the Mass and Liturgical settings. It has elicited many, many different thoughts and feelings in me. Which is why I am reaching out to all of you! God has blessed me so, so abundantly in giving me brothers and sisters from so many different cultures, traditions and parts of the world. So here is what I would like to dialogue with you about – what does “Sacred” mean in your culture or church tradition? What does “sacred music” look like in Haitian, Ugandan, Congolese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Zambian, Rwandan, Cambodian, Indian, Egyptian, Somali, Eastern Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox....and so many other cultures? The Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church have given us directives to use “sacred” music in the Mass, but I am struggling with what this means...“sacred”. The Bishops talk a lot about Gregorian Chant as being the highest form of “sacred chant” available to the universal church. But I really struggle with this. When I was in “the bush” in Zambia, in particular, the Christians there danced, drummed and sang with unabashed passion. And this seemed no less “sacred” to me than the wondrous sounds of a Western orchestra, choir and organ. Actually, for me, it was MORE sacred.

I do not disagree for a moment that God is worthy of the best and most sacred worship we can offer Him. But it seems to me that we must explore what “sacred worship” means in a broader context than Gregorian Chant, Eastern Chant, Western European “classical” music or any other music entails. Otherwise we might fall prey to making the universal Church too much like Europe or the East rather than honoring and celebrating the unique expressions of “The Sacred” found all over the globe.

I want to know what “The Sacred” means for you and your people or culture, or for the people you work with. This is especially poignant for me as I begin to work with the kids at my parish school. Recently I asked a group of 8th graders (about 24 students) to tell me how many of them like “church music”. Not ONE of them raised their hands! Not ONE! Wow! I find myself asking “Does this mean these kids don't have any sense of ‘the sacred’?” “Does this mean that our kids in western cultures are totally out of touch with what is ‘sacred’?” I don't know about you, but I just can't answer those questions with a quick “Yes!”. It seems to me that our youth – those I hear spoken of as ‘the future of the Church’ – could very well be a key to our understanding the “sense of the sacred” in our time. Maybe?

As I have researched music since starting my position as Music Minister with these kids, I have found some INCREDIBLE Christian music out there, both Catholic and Protestant! But it would not, I think, fit the definition of the Bishop's description of “sacred music”. But does that mean it is not “sacred” to our youth? Does that mean there is no place for “this” music in the solemn celebration of

Almighty God in the Mass, or in a solemn Protestant worship service? If ZERO percent of our kids are drawn to current “church music”, then what do we do? Do we only do music they can relate to – music that may be ‘sacred’ to THEM – at conferences or at schools or youth retreats, but NOT at Mass, at the most sacred times we come together as a WHOLE Catholic/Christian family?

I don’t have any firm answers to these questions as yet. I only have the aching struggle in my soul to reconcile the beauty of the Mass, Divine Liturgy or Worship Service with the beauty of our kids and all that they consider beautiful and ‘sacred’. That’s why I am reaching out to all of you! I would love to hear your thoughts about this. I would love to hear about how people in “The Valley” of eastern Zambia experience “The Sacred” in their lives, including in music. I would love to hear how Egyptian Christians – people of “The East” – experience “The Sacred” in their worship. And on and on and on.....in ALL your cultures, traditions!

I don’t want for even a moment to cheapen the sense of awe and wonder our God deserves in our worship! But I also want to meet our kids where they are RIGHT NOW! When I asked another class one day how many of them come to Mass on Sundays, THREE out of 24 said “Yes!” I just don’t accept that this means these kids are less interested in God than we adults who DO go to Mass, the Divine Liturgy or to Worship Services. When I play Christian Rap Artists for these kids, they come alive. And isn’t that part of what the “sacred” is supposed to do, to bring us alive and to bring us closer to our Lord and God? If a medium like “Christian rap” or “rock” brings youth more deeply into the presence of God, and elicits a deeper desire on their part to follow Him AND to be a part of the bigger body of Christ, then is it really “right” to say that what they find “sacred” and “meaningful” with regard to music is NOT truly sacred?

It is good to reach out to all of you with these questions and musings. In doing so I am again reminded of the incredible blessings God has brought into my life in knowing you, people from countries and cultures all over the earth. I love to imagine that picture John the Beloved describes in Revelation 7:9....“the multitude too large to count, from EVERY nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb!!!!!! I love to imagine you in that multitude! And somehow when I imagine this scene musically, I just can’t imagine that we’re all going to be singing and chanting Gregorian Chant or Western European Classical music. Maybe some of us will be singing in this way! But others are going to be singing like the people I went to Mass with in the far distant villages I visited in Zambia, too.

Enough of my thoughts....I can’t wait to enter into a dialogue with you, and hopefully, a dialogue between ALL of us. If you want to respond to my e-mail, please respond to “ALL” so all of us can here about your thoughts and experience. There are Roman Catholics in this “community”, there are Protestants, there are Catholics from the Eastern Rite churches, there are Orthodox Christians. I am hoping that through our dialogue I can gain some nuggets of wisdom and experience that will help me as I seek to lead the kids I have been given to serve into a deeper love relationship with “The Lamb” and with His Church.

God be with each one of you as you seek to love Him and those around you! I send you my love!

John Paul

Blog at WordPress.com.