

This Sunday is Pentecost, which is often called the “birthday” of the Church because it was on Pentecost that the Church was made manifest. Our Lord has now ascended into Heaven – His definitive departure, in *human form*, not to return (in human form) until the end of time. He has now entrusted the Church to the Magisterium and to her priests, who are to be guided by the Spirit of God. The Diocese of Sioux Falls also has ordinations this week. It seems like a good time, then, to talk a little about the exercise of the ordained priesthood – carrying out the will of God...the will of *God*, not the will of “the people,” or of the loudest, or of those who will cause trouble if their desires are not followed.

Whenever a priest takes a new assignment, he has to take the following Oath of Fidelity:

In fulfilling the charge entrusted to me in the name of the Church, **I shall hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety; I shall faithfully hand it on and explain it, and I shall avoid any teachings contrary to it.**

I shall follow and foster the common discipline of the entire Church and I shall maintain the observance of all ecclesiastical laws, especially those contained in the Code of Canon Law.

The Church’s laity and clergy are meant to form a single, unified body with Christ as the head. While laity and clergy do have distinct roles – just like organs of a human body – they are meant to operate in unison, not in opposition. The Oath of Fidelity expresses the *duty* of priests and bishops before God. Is that what most people really expect or want from the priest? In fact, many oppose the very things that this oath expresses, thus not building up the Kingdom of God but rather tearing away at it. The Church cannot be overcome, it will perdure to the end of time – because our Lord guaranteed it. However, the almost constant opposition to this oath – well this is what I want, this is what think, in short pride born out of self-interest – tears away at the Kingdom and impedes its progress on earth. If this is what a person does, yes they may cause harm to others (if that’s what they want), but ultimately they are just bringing about their own demise. If everyone who called themselves Catholic supported this oath, clergy and laity alike, if this is what people expected from priests and bishops, the Church would be strong, it would serve the Lord, even in the face of the strongest worldly opposition.

Fr Jerry Pokorsky is a priest for the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia and a regular columnist for catholicculture.org. Some time ago he wrote a very well articulated article on this very topic. The following are some excerpts from Fr Pokorsky’s article...

The rhetoric of persuasion has its place in all walks of life. Kindliness and compromise are cornerstones of human relations. Politicians craft political platforms with as many planks as necessary to appeal to the most voters. But there are limits to the language of persuasion, even among the experts. Good politicians stand by their principles but negotiate prudential judgments on the edges. Bad politicians are like Groucho Marx, who said, “Those are my principles, and if you don’t like them... well, I have others.”

Many Church authorities carefully avoid cultural controversies. Absent the motivation for the salvation of souls, few ask why “bigger is better” in Church. Young priests usually overestimate the power of their persuasive abilities. They soon discover that some people protest their homilies when the remarks touch upon the hot-button topics of the day, such as heaven and hell, mortal sin, purgatory, the indissolubility of marriage, abortion, and same-sex unions.

Unnerved by the objections and realizing that most of us are unmoved in our comfort zones, priests often avoid controversies to keep the peace. Catholics struggling to live upright lives suffer neglect for the sake of the Sacraments, and cafeteria Catholics (to borrow an old term) retain comfortable religiosity. Crisis averted. Contributions remain steady.

The “don’t offend, don’t defend” persuasion strategy gains traction and causes long-term shifts in Christian practice. The priest risks his soul by failing to defend his sheep from the wolves. Believing Catholics become

discouraged. Other Catholics gravitate to large Protestant evangelical congregations with vibrant old-time-religion preachers...

Many Catholics haven't studied the Faith since Confirmation. Real or imagined hostile memories replace the splendor of the Church. Who hasn't heard stories about irascible priests in the confessional or nuns rapping the knuckles of naughty kids? For those trying to explain their distance from the Church, the nuclear option—mention of clerical child abuse—always remains in the polemical arsenal. Add cultural prejudices to stunted religious practice, and the Catholic Church becomes a prototype of a staid, judgmental, and hateful religion.

It isn't uncommon for Catholics to exaggerate their grasp of the Faith. Despite CCD indoctrination, many (if not most) Catholics cannot list the Sacraments and Commandments. Basic morality suffers. Alas, shoplifting is at epidemic levels.

“Indoctrination” has implications that violate the rhetoric of friendly persuasion. Too bad. Every school system indoctrinates children. Benign indoctrination imparts the principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The indoctrination—however painful—bears fruit. Academic skills accommodate satisfying interests, mature as employment opportunities, and help pay bills.

As we abandon our religion because we fail to see its value, memories from our religious indoctrination become barren. The pain suffered in developing academic skills pays off in the marketplace. The discomfort of Christian formation that promises personal integrity provokes cultural wrath. When we ditch our religion to follow our dreams without Jesus, we resent the Ten Commandments as “hateful” restraints rather than precepts of virtue that set us free.

Morality abhors a vacuum. As the culture and the educational establishment suppress the Ten Commandments, another code of ethics replaces these Godly precepts. The diversity, equity, and inclusion ideologies—incompatible with the Commandments—become a competing rule of life. Need evidence? How would most government school officials treat any teacher or student who said there are only two genders? The authorities would label the teacher or child a religious fanatic. Doctors deny their medical training when insurance companies force them to ask patients, “What is your sex assigned at birth?” Shoplifters promote equity.

Many lapsed Catholics demonize the Church for the distant and undeveloped teachings that remain dormant in their memories. The Church imposes morality, they argue. Yet walking away from the Church poses no threat to reputation and livelihood. Former Catholics approvingly look upon the apostasy of Church leaders without intending to return to the fold. Who needs a Church to provide what the culture already supplies? Still, they cannot tolerate disagreement.

Jesus is not a politician, and He did not use the rhetoric of political persuasion. His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well was friendly and honest (cf. Lk. 15:1-32). He promised her—and us—the “living waters” of the Sacraments. The truth and grace of His words transform the woman, and she becomes an Apostle to the Samaritans. ...

The truth of Jesus, not the rhetoric of persuasion, is the foundation of all evangelization. The indivisible truths of Jesus guide us to salvation. No shortcuts. Either we accept His entire platform of truth, or we reject it. We cannot regard Church teaching as piecemeal if we want to retain our integrity in Jesus. The ugly politics of persuasion promising diversity, equity, and inclusion will fail because the precepts deny science and always exclude the teachings of Jesus.

Thoughtful Catholics imitate Jesus and proclaim the Kingdom. There is (or should be) no rhetorical manipulation. There is no heartfelt pleading for conversion. We respect intelligence. We honor freedom. We merely proclaim the truth of Jesus. His words intimidate or console. Unlike the tyranny of our secular culture, the Church proposes but does not impose. Take it or leave it. Souls in heaven are better than souls in hell. In our hearts with Jesus, we hope to share our Christian joy now and forever.

God bless you. Fr Kuhn