

Coming or Going?

“So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. The hardworking farmer ought to have the first share of the crop. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory. This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will deny us. If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.” – 2 Tim 2: 1, 3, 6, 7, 10-13

My wife and I were discussing people who lose their faith and leave the Church. Over the years, persons I know have left the Catholic Church; and I’m saddened and more than a little concerned to hear it again. Alan, a childhood friend, went to Catholic seminary in the 80’s and left the Church never to return. I understand that he now teaches anti-Catholicism to those who attend his classes at a nearby church. I haven’t seen him for some time; I don’t know what I would say, but maybe he has a legitimate beef. Maybe someone misbehaved. Did he leave Jesus because of a Judas? Judases are everywhere; and, if Jesus chose one to be among his hand picked apostles, then there are sure to be some in every Christian community, even this Council.

Bob, another childhood friend speaks terribly about the Church, his mother, his children; he gossips and becomes insulting when I relate what the Church really teaches. I don’t know what happens in a person’s mind or heart when they walk away from the Eucharist but something happens. I was driving around with Bob one day when, out of the blue, he pulled a CD out of his glove box and insisted I listen to the lead singer, a young ex-Catholic girl with a beautiful voice who attends his church. He raved about the choir, the activities and the young pastor that he can “really talk to,” then invited me to attend his church. He made sure to mention (or rub in) how many were ex-Catholics. Ex-Catholics “understand?” So, me, I ask a few questions to find out what someone has to offer in place of the Mass.

With what would I replace the body and blood of Jesus? So far only a good choir, good preaching and good fellowship have been offered. Do people really leave the real presence of Jesus for music, preaching and fellowship? I can find music and fellowship anywhere, but with what authority does one preach? Bob once stated; “Catholics have too many rules, doctrines and dogmas, my church only believes what the bible teaches”.

Merriam-Webster.com defines dogma this way: “1. Something held as an established opinion; especially: a definite authoritative tenet. 2. A doctrine or body of doctrines concerning faith or morals formally stated and authoritatively

proclaimed by a church.” If a group of people doesn’t submit itself to a body of truth, then it must be selecting the “truth” that it will adhere to. Where will that lead?

For my friends who have left the Church, it has lead away from the Eucharist and the sacraments that unite God with His people. People who don’t go to confession have to forgive themselves, and only God can forgive. People who forgive themselves never give themselves penance and never hear the comforting words of absolution. They may keep anger with the people who offend them, even their closest family members and rather than seek the wise counsel of the priest they may gossip. Ex-Catholics who “understand” can be very stressful to be around.

In the reading from St. Paul’s 2nd letter to Timothy (above) he tells us “to be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus” and to “bear your share of hardship”. What hardship does he have in mind? How much strength in Christ Jesus is required to overcome the hardship? Do I have that kind of strength? How can I develop that strength and who can coach me? Is it someone in the Church that Jesus established? St. Paul continues, “I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory.” St. Paul bears everything for the sake of the chosen, and, while we are all chosen, some will not answer, and some will answer and abandon the call.

This would be a terrible thing to have heard the call of God then abandon it and not obtain the eternal glory. St. Paul wraps up the passage with a saying that is “trustworthy”: “If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he will deny us.” This is a great meditation and the best coach to get in shape for the challenge is as near as the nearest confessional.

I myself left the Church when I was still in high school and drifted for about 28 years. I’ve seen the damage that living apart from the sacraments can bring. I’ve met the Judases and I’ve been the Judas. I’ve been the person that people have said, “If he’s a Catholic then I don’t want any part of that church.” It’s very easy to forgive oneself and not require internal change. I don’t wish that type of freedom on anyone.

November business meeting is on Thursday November 4th at 7:00 PM. Mass for the deceased Knights of this council is on Friday, November 12th, at 5:45 PM followed by adoration and confession. Pray that God send more workers to the harvest. Pray for the men and women who serve in the military. Pray that politicians have a conversion of heart.

Ed Ibarra

