

Resolve This Season To Step Up And Be An Active And Involved Catholic

By BISHOP GERALD KICANAS

If I were to ask you, "What religion are you?," you would likely answer, "Roman Catholic." And if I were to ask you, "Do you go to Mass weekly or monthly or only twice a year at Christmas and Easter?," what would you say?

If I further asked you, "Are you registered in a parish and are you involved in at least one ministry or activity of the parish?," how would you respond?

We know from research done by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) that an estimated 75,734,515 people in the United States identify themselves as Catholic. There are about 18,176,284 who say they go to Church weekly; 37,109,913 who attend monthly and 51,499,470 who reported themselves as twice a year Mass attenders. CARA also estimated that 3,029,381 people are engaged in some ministry or activity of their parish.

These are not great numbers. They are worrisome numbers.

Prior to Vatican II people lived in fear of missing Mass on Sunday. These days, monthly Mass attendance has replaced weekly attendance for many Catholics, and some Catholics go to Mass only on Ash Wednesday (not even an obligation), and Christmas or Easter.

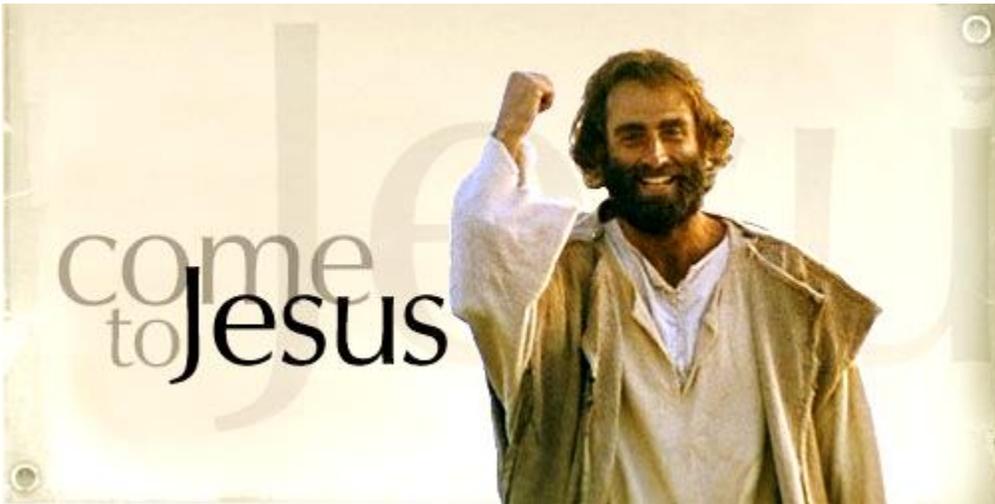


To change Mass from something we feel required to do into something we want to do involves moving from childhood to adulthood in our faith life. It means growing in understanding of who we are as Catholics and what it means to be baptized. It means internalizing our faith and having an encounter with Jesus Christ that leads us to a personal commitment to live out our faith with a fervent desire to express that faith in what we say and do.

This Christmas our churches will be jam packed with Catholics standing along the side and back walls of their parishes. This is an occasion, an opportunity not to scold people or to berate them for their too frequent absence from church, but a precious moment to invite our brothers and sisters, our fellow Catholics to take their place at the family table sharing in the Eucharistic feast.

It is the perfect time to explain how much we miss them; just as when a family gathers and all notice those that are missing. We need to remind those who do not attend Mass often that every Catholic belongs at the family table. We can remind our infrequent member that they matter in the Church and that we want to make them aware of how welcome they are with us. We need to let our sometime parishioners know they are part of the family.





When one meets Christ they long to share in the Lord's banquet and they also ardently desire to carry on His mission as disciples, as evangelizers and as active and engaged members of the Lord's family.

For example: During the recent elections, fervent members of both parties were out encouraging people to vote for their candidates.

Some paid exorbitant amounts of money to make sure a specific candidate won. These supporters were not sitting idly on the sidelines about their involvement. They valued their party's policies and platform and they wanted that party's mission realized. They got personally involved.

In order to encourage Catholics to identify as being Catholic and to become active members of their parish communities, they need to be embraced, seized by Christ, inspired by His mission, and taken up by His call. Then they will become good stewards, willing to share their time, their talent and their resources to build up the Church.

When we were baptized, we became a daughter or a son of God. When we were washed in the waters and arose as a member of the "royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people set apart," we experienced a life-defining moment.

We need to understand what happened at our baptism; that is, we need to come to the realization that our lives can never be about sitting on the sideline unengaged or uninvolved. Rather, we need to see that we have a part to play in making Christ's mission live.

Just think what good could happen if we could encourage 10 percent, just 10 percent of those who attend Mass monthly or twice a year to come to Mass every week. Just think what a phenomenal difference it would make if that 10 percent could be active in living the faith to become missionary disciples, willing to live as good stewards,

I often hear pastors lament about the small percent of registered Catholics who are active in their parishes. I ponder why it is that such a small number of Catholics participate in the Annual Catholic Appeal – the major fundraiser for our diocesan ministries and charities – or for St. Vincent de Paul or the Pio Decimo Center or any of the other social services, ministries or charities at work in our Diocese. At the beginning of this article, I wrote that the estimates on Catholic Mass attendance were worrisome. Well, this lack of support to those in need, to our Church at work is worrisome too.

Be inspired this Advent and Christmas time to make a commitment to be regular Mass attenders and engaged in the mission of the Church. Resolve to step up and get more involved. What a blessing that would be for you and your Church!

