

Fr. Perozich comments –

I do not want to fit in, to be praised by anyone on earth, to be “on the right side of history” as humans define it.

I desire forgiveness of my sins, transformation into the mind, desire and will of Jesus and resurrection to eternal life.

For this I expect persecution outside the church and now, even from church leaders who have given over to a secular gospel of climate change, immigration, great reset, income redistribution, ignoring of abortion, sexual rights, submission to the UN and to governments even when they are in conflict with Jesus and His teaching.

The church is undergoing change as it always has. In the beginning it was an itinerant church, the apostles and their successors preaching the word to whomever would listen, establishing small communities, baptizing converts, laying hands on presbyters, suffering persecution for several hundred years.

With Constantine and the Edict of Milan in the church began to live in the open with lessened persecution and to become an establishment and institutional church with buildings, hierarchy, money, influence, power.

The church always has been LEAVEN for the world, bringing about union with Jesus.

Membership in the church is dropping. The commentators say it is because the church has, like salt, lost her flavor, failing to preach her message of salvation in Jesus and preaching a secular message defined by world leaders.

The church never will disappear.

The POWER of the church and her immediate influence will wane as a result of her failure to preach Jesus Christ crucified.

For too long Christians wanted to be a part of the worldly structure and sacrificed the message to do so. The result is folks no longer find a life changing message in her, rather they put faith in other institutions such as government.

Stephen White guides us Catholics in how to understand and respond to be leaven for the world, salt of the earth:

• we shouldn't despair of the diminished position in which the Church now finds herself.

• Catholics in the United States – and here I mean both the clergy and the laity – too often demonstrate a complacency of mind more characteristic of an establishment church than a distinctive minority. This includes, by the way, a certain insecurity about “losing a culture” that was never really ours to begin with.

- **American Catholics are, and always have been, a religious minority.**

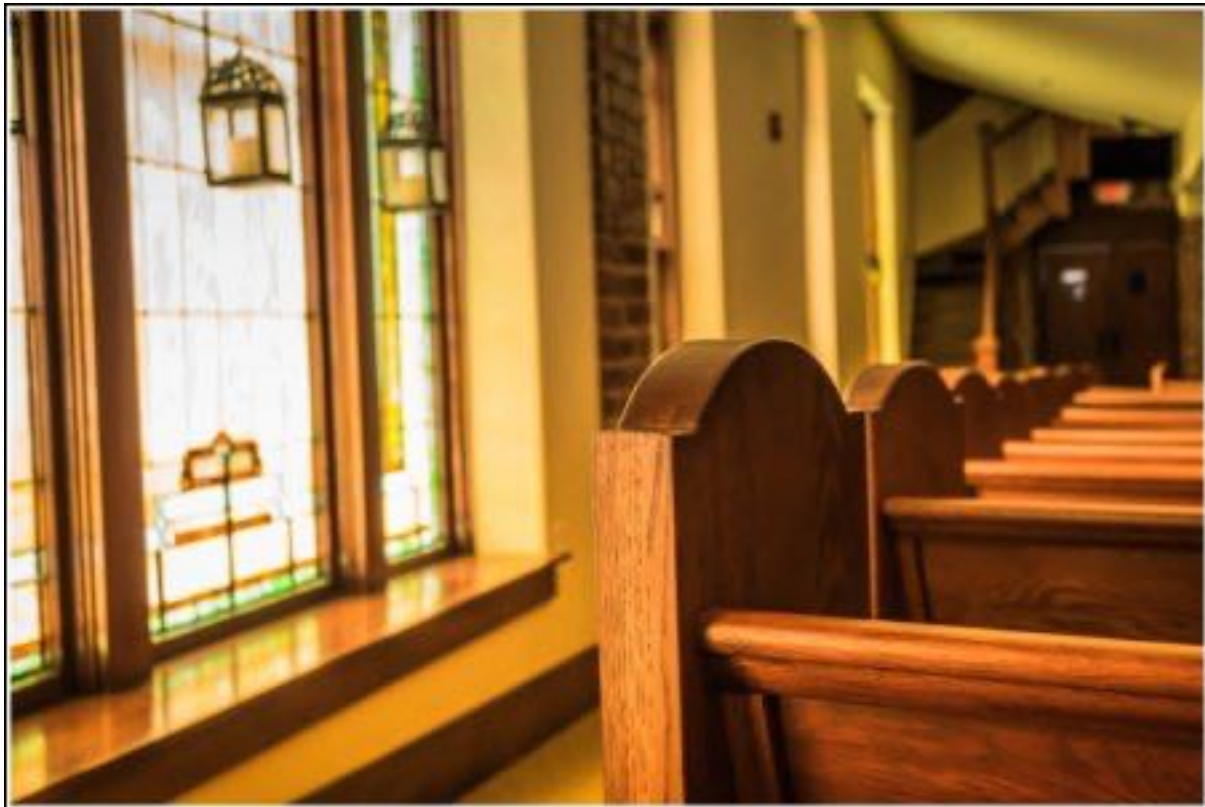
- *Being a religious minority is not an evangelical panacea any more than being a persecuted Church is. **Assimilation to a culture that is not Catholic – or even, these days, particularly Christian – is a perennial danger and a pointed one now for both Catholics and Catholic institutions.** In the coming decades, many of the institutional gains made by the Church in the last century may be lost, whether through attrition, or lack of funds, or as a result of onerous state action.*

- *It means remembering to worry less about the loaf and more about being **leaven**.*

Is the church dying out?

By [Rev. Mark H. Creech](#)

April 1, 2021



This week the Washington Post reported on a Gallup poll that says church membership has fallen below the majority in America for the first time. In 2020, less than 50% of American adults attend a church, synagogue, or mosque. That's down by 20 points since the turn of the century.

The article quoted Tara Isabella Burton, author of "Strange rites: New Religions for a Godless world." Burton "attributes the national decline in religious affiliation to two major trends among younger Americans. First, she points to the broader shifts suggesting a larger distrust of institutions, including police and pharmaceutical companies. Some Americans are disillusioned by the behavior of religious leaders, including the Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal and the strong White evangelical alignment with former President Donald Trump."

Such claims are to be taken with a grain of salt. Quite frankly, I think the matter has more to do with the way **so many mainline churches have watered down the Christian message. Over the decades, denominations have compromised on the authority of the Scriptures, and various core Christian doctrines. Much of the church in America has so badly become a reflection of worldly values, it has now been downgraded from a world-transforming force to little more than an apostate religious country club.**

It's interesting to note Gallup reported "declines in church membership are proportionately smaller among political conservatives, Republicans, married adults and college graduates. These groups tend to have among the highest rates of church membership, along with Southern residents and non-Hispanic Black adults." Perhaps this is because these groups still generally hold to traditional Christian teaching.

Although these figures are concerning, what most troubles me is the way misguided individuals will use such reports to argue the church is dying out. Therefore, people should dismiss it.

Back in April of 2012, Diane Butler Bass wrote for HuffPost: “Something startling is happening in American religion: We are witnessing the end of the church or, at the very least, the end of conventional church. The United States is fast becoming a society where Christianity is being reorganized after religion.” No doubt, this latest report from Gallup will be used to buttress such assertions.

Nevertheless, claims like this are nothing less than “pea-turkey,” as I used to hear an old fiery preacher of yesteryear say. And the proof is in what we celebrate this Easter weekend.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the assurance of the final triumph of Christianity, but of Christ’s church. When our Lord rose from the dead, he imparted his resurrection life to all who believe the Gospel. The resurrection speaks to us not only of the life hereafter, but of power to live an overcoming life in the present. This capacity is evident in the history of the church and so shall remain until the end of time.



Consider this remarkable quote about the church from a sermon by Thomas Alfred Gurney written around the turn of the 20th Century:

- **“The Christian society in the midst of the world has leavened that world with the influences of its own victorious life.** From the depths of degradation, the full measure of which we can never now know, against forces which were tremendous and unparalleled in the power of their common cohesion and common interest, it has uplifted earthly society to the level at which we behold it today. It has achieved this in spite of the fact that it has often been grossly untrue to its own ideals and for whole periods has neglected or ignored its true mission...Though its members have too often been the victims of false hierarchical theories, or dupes of worldly policy and worldly ambition, or the prey, as Christ

foretold, of hirelings who cared not for the sheep...though human in all its terrible defects, has been witness to a Divine Life within. Never has the light been wholly extinguished, though often the windows have been darkened. Never has the Life been wholly lost, though its energies have been paralyzed by sin. Never has the Holy Spirit been grieved beyond measure with man's willfulness and waywardness, withdrawn from the Body which He had filled and returned to the Heaven whence He came down. The record of human unfaithfulness is wonderful when we consider the fact from which we start, but the story of Divine Patience is still more wonderful. The salt has never lost its savour completely; the leaven, however, checked in its effects, has carried still some germ of life within. The history of the church of Christ has been one of progress, though the progress has had many drawbacks. The history of human society as affected by it has been one of gradual but permanent advance. The Risen Christ has confirmed to His Church, by a charter which even Hell cannot annul, the gift of His own victorious life...The power of His resurrection is given to His Church. The indwelling Spirit of the Risen Christ becomes...her true keynote."

- People often talk about the need to be on the right side of history. If one would truly be on the right side of history, then he or she should surrender fully to the one who defeated death on that first Easter morn. Despite its apparent weaknesses and evident failures, the Church of Jesus Christ is imbued with His resurrection power and destined to overcome – to rule and reign with Him forever.

Not a Loaf, but Leaven

Stephen P. White THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021

A recent Gallup poll indicates that, for the first time in living memory, fewer than half of Americans (47 percent) consider themselves members of a church. For most of the 20th century, the rate hovered around 70 percent. That number has been declining since at least the late 1990s, but the decline appears to be accelerating.

Membership in a church, it should be said, doesn't necessarily reflect belief or religious affiliation. The question Gallup asked in its poll was, "Do you happen to be a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque?" A fallen-away Catholic and a Catholic in search of a parish in a new city might both plausibly answer in the negative. While a minority of Americans claim "membership" in some church, according to Gallup, 76 percent still claim some religious "affiliation."

Particularly concerning for Catholics is that, even among those whose "affiliation" is Catholic, the rate of "membership" has fallen almost 20 percent since 1998. That's twice the rate of decline seen among Protestants.

There is much to lament in these numbers, and in the myriad unhappy explanations for why such decline is happening. Without in any way dismissing legitimate concerns about such decline and what it means for the Church and her mission (to say nothing of souls), we shouldn't despair of the diminished position in which the Church now finds herself.

Catholics in the United States – and here I mean both the clergy and the laity – too often demonstrate a complacency of mind more characteristic of an establishment church than a distinctive minority. This includes, by the way, a certain insecurity about "losing a culture" that was never really ours to begin with.

American Catholics are, and always have been, a religious minority. The fact that there are so many of us, and that

our political and cultural numbers are, at least at the national level, disproportionate to our numbers in society at large can sometimes blind us to this reality. (Consider: taking “Catholic” in the widest sense, the Supreme Court has a Catholic majority; Catholics of various sorts are 31 percent of the House and 24 percent of the Senate. And then there is President Biden.)

For all the signs of religious decline, there remain some 70 million Catholics in the United States. The precise number depends on who is doing the counting and how, but even if we fudge the numbers – a few million here or there – the United States is still home to the fourth-largest Catholic population in the world behind Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines.



*

It might come as a surprise that there are more Catholics in the United States than there are in Italy or the Democratic Republic of Congo. There are about twice as many Catholics here as there are in Colombia

or Poland. We have roughly the same Catholic population as Spain and France combined.

One significant difference between the United States and the other countries that round-out this top ten list is this: The United States is the only one in which Catholics are a clear minority. Only about a quarter of Americans are Catholic, which means the United States is not just home to the world's fourth-largest Catholic population; it is home to the largest Catholic minority Church in the world.

Being a religious minority is not an evangelical panacea any more than being a persecuted Church is. Assimilation to a culture that is not Catholic – or even, these days, particularly Christian – is a perennial danger and a pointed one now for both Catholics and Catholic institutions. In the coming decades, many of the institutional gains made by the Church in the last century may be lost, whether through attrition, or lack of funds, or as a result of onerous state action.

But having a large minority Church does present certain advantages, and Catholics in the United States ought to be thinking more about how to stand out, and less about how to fit in. It means every Catholic – all 70,000,000 of us – needs to take seriously the mission laid upon us in baptism and the vocation to holiness.

It means bringing our faith into public life, including our politics, but not despairing when “victory” does not come. It means not waiting for “the Church” to “evangelize the culture,” as if that task belongs primarily to our priests or our bishops or the pope. Everyday holiness doesn't wait for some grand strategy of evangelization.

And it means not letting the latest dispute in the Church – whatever that may be – distract our attention from those around us: our spouses, our children, our parents, our siblings, our fellow parishioners, our neighbors, our co-workers.

It means remembering to worry less about the loaf and more about being leaven.

***Image:** Home run: St. John Paul II greeting a capacity crowd at Shea Stadium, October 3, 1979, during his first visit to the United States as pope. (AP photo)

© 2021 *The Catholic Thing*. All rights reserved. For reprint rights, write to:
info@frinstitute.org

The Catholic Thing is a forum for intelligent Catholic commentary. Opinions
expressed by writers are solely their own.