

Fr. Perozich comments —

This article is shared with you because I listen to your frustrations.

*I am an American as are most of you. Americans think that we can “fix” everything, any **messes** by voting, protesting, writing letters, complaining, fighting, and on, as if the **mess** were like a politically organized effort or war.*

*In this spiritual **mess** all of the “fixing” techniques may help, but God must be the fixer.*

*The author Eric Sammons has identified a profound **mess** beyond our control.*

*He offers a fix through internal order in our particular lives to survive the **mess** that surrounds us, into which we are drawn simply for being members of Jesus’ one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, even when such a church no longer seems to manifest in our current **mess**.*

- **We cannot find order in ecclesial politics or the life of the Church, but we can find order in our own Catholic life. Prayer, the Sacraments, knowing our Faith, a life of charity—this is where we must keep our focus, our own internal order.**

OPINION

Living in a Messy Church

*The "**mess**" in the Church today is reflected in the total lack of order found in ecclesial appointments and suspensions. The unfaithful are rewarded while the faithful are disciplined.*



[Eric Sammons](#)

Pope Francis wanted a mess; Pope Francis got a **mess**. The recent news that he will ask for Bishop Joseph Strickland's resignation is just the latest example. But like a bad infomercial that continually promises even more features, "That's not all!"

Cardinal-designate Archbishop Víctor **Manuel Fernández**, the new head of the dicastery in charge of defending the Faith recently **spouted heretical concepts** of a "doctrine of the Holy Father." Fr. **James Altman**, a priest who was removed from public ministry for his conservative political opinions, now asserts that Jorge Bergoglio isn't really the pope. Cardinal **Jean-Pierre Ricard**, who would be a voting member if a conclave were held today, has admitted to sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl yet has received no discipline from the Vatican. The **German bishops** are openly defying Church teaching with nary a peep from the pope or the Vatican. **Frank Pavone** was removed from the clerical state for defying his bishop, and then was accused of inappropriate behavior with women in his employ. **And there's serious reason to believe that the upcoming Synod on Synodality will attempt not just to undermine, but to reject, fundamental Catholic teaching.**

That's quite a fine **mess** we've gotten into, Holy Father.

The underlying thread that connects these various scandals is the same characteristic that defines a **“mess”**—a total lack of order. **Clerics are dismissed from their jobs for flimsy reasons while others admit to scandalous behavior without reprisal. Crackdowns are ordered on perceived ideological foes like American traditionalists, while German bishops apparently can say anything without fear of Vatican discipline.**

“But there is order!” you say? “There is ideological order—only the good guys are punished.” In this lawless landscape there is the temptation to see order where there is none.

This seems like a legitimate argument. After all, Pope Francis does appear to be driven by ideology, punishing his foes, real or perceived, and rewarding his friends. A theological lightweight and papal toady like Archbishop Fernández is elevated to one of the most important posts in the Church while a brilliant and faithful Churchman like Cardinal Raymond Burke is sidelined. There's no question this pope has an enemies list, and he's not shy about using his power to enforce his ideology.

Yet the danger for Catholics who cling to Catholic orthodoxy—which means at times faithfully resisting this pontificate—is falling into the same trap as Francis appears to have fallen into. He divides the world into friends and foes and puts loyalty to party ideology over all

considerations, including faithfulness to Christ. We cannot do the same.

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For example, Fr. James Altman became a cause célèbre in the Catholic world when he was removed from public ministry by his bishop for his political preaching. At the time, we were told it was because of his “tone,” but we all knew that was code for “I don’t like his conservative politics.” After all, we’ve seen priest after priest loudly shill for liberal political causes like immigration with no ecclesial consequences. This was a hit job, plain and simple, and modeled on Pope Francis’s own modus operandi.

Yet the unjust removal of Fr. Altman does not mean Altman himself cannot stray. While the popular priest has not embraced heresy like so many of his priestly brothers, **he has taken on authority he does not have and declared the See of Peter currently vacant.** I’m not going to rehash arguments against sedevacantism now (see my article [here](#) for a brief synopsis on why no individual priest can declare a pope deposed of office), but suffice it to say, Fr. Altman’s descent into sedevacantism is not something faithful

Catholics should support, even if they strongly agree with many of his criticisms of Francis and the Vatican.

Yet it's easy to be sympathetic toward Fr. Altman and his supporters, for the **mess** that surrounds us is truly tragic and screams for order to be imposed. Hyperpapalists will just look at the **mess** and pretend it's actually order—"if the pope says it, it must be true!" At least sedevacantists are willing to be honest and recognize there is a **mess**.

When we see so many people falling away from the Faith—and not only are our ecclesial leaders not doing anything to stop it, but they are actively working to accelerate it—we desperately want some way to clean up the mess. Sedevacantism can be tempting for some Catholics because it does create at least the appearance of order—a vacant See of St. Peter means we can just leave the **messy** room and create our own, orderly room. But that's not a true solution, for it turns a blind eye to the **mess** we're in.

How long, O Lord? Wilt thou forget me for ever?

How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

*How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?*

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Psalm 13:1-2)

Today's faithful Catholic echoes the cry of the psalmist. Why is the Lord allowing such a **mess**? I don't

know, and I would guess no one else does, either. We live in a difficult time to be a Catholic, a **messy** time.

We cannot find order in ecclesial politics or the life of the Church, but we can find order in our own Catholic life. Prayer, the Sacraments, knowing our Faith, a life of charity—this is where we must keep our focus, our own internal order.

This is not a call for an “ostrich with his head in the sand” attitude. **We can’t just ignore when one of our loved ones falls away or embraces a false Catholicism due to the machinations of ecclesial leaders. But if we live as faithful Catholics we will be given the opportunity to witness our Faith to them. We will be able to show them the order and beauty of Catholicism that is currently covered up by the **mess**.**

Ultimately, we can be at peace knowing that Our Lord will not judge us for a **mess** beyond our control; all He asks us is to tidy up the **mess** in our own lives, and under our own control.

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Author



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