Estimated Reading Time: 2 ½ minutes

Gotta Worship Somebody

Part One: Society of Mary and Worship

Before COVID-19 appeared on the scene, 21.1% of American Catholics attended Mass every week, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. It was projected that figure could get as low as 12% by 2030. However, in light of COVID-19, that figure could be reached by 2023 or 2024.[1] Of course, there are numerous explanations for this disturbing trend.

Fr. Jean-Claude Colin, the founder of the Society of Mary, saw the education of youth as an opportunity to engage with the parents. Many had left the Catholic Church or their relationship with the Church was tenuous. That was due to the turmoil caused by the French Revolution. Many had rebelled against the Church due to its close association with the wealthy and the powerful. People were given a choice between supporting the Church, which would mean incurring penalties (including death) or embracing the tenets of the Revolution, which would include denouncing the Church of Rome in favor of a French National Church.

Our nation is experiencing similar turmoil that includes a clash of differing political, religious, ethical, and philosophical positions. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" Contemporary society has answered that question with, "There is no truth. There is only personal truth." Gone are the days when we used to distinguish between fact and opinion, truth and lies.

We also have taken Pontius Pilate's question to the next level. We ask, "What is reality?" and conclude whatever we want it to be. That stands to reason. If there is no objective truth, there is only subjective truth. That spells trouble, which takes the form of division, confrontation, hostility, and even violence.

From the Catholic perspective, everyone has become their own magisterium:[2] the final arbiter about what is right and wrong, what is true and what is false. It is ironic, given that those who oppose the idea of the Church possessing that charism appropriate it to themselves.

The above has weakened the connection with institutions, including the Church. Just as in Fr. Colin's day when the Church had contributed to the Revolution by its close association with the wealthy and powerful, the Catholic Church today has contributed to its demise with the sexual abuse scandals or even doctrinal disputes.

However, I would suggest this does not explain the rise in the decline of Catholics attending Mass on Sundays. The Church has survived many scandals, doctrinal disputes, and pandemics throughout its 2,000-year history. There is something else afoot.

The quieter summer months allow me to devote some time and energy to reflecting on this turn of events but from the perspective of the Society of Mary. My following meditations will explore what we mean by worship and why it is not a question of whether or not to worship but who or what to worship. The poet

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[1] Shaw, Russell, *The Future is Here for US Catholics*, The Boston Pilot, July 13, 2022, www.thebostonpilot.com/article.php?ID=189623.

[2] "The Teaching Authority of the Church," by Msgr. Ronald Knox, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-teaching-authority-of-the-church.

Bob Dylan got it right when he composed the poem, *"Gotta Serve Somebody*.[3]" He just as easily could have said, "Gotta Worship Somebody."[4]

The same point was made in the following verse from the book of Joshua 24:15. Where you see "serve," read "worship." "If it is displeasing to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Gotta worship somebody!

[3]"Gotta Serve Somebody" https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/gotta-serve-somebody/.