Estimated Reading Time: 5:45 Minutes

Glory to God

Part Two: The Society of Mary and Worship

Catholics and other Christians understand the importance of attending Mass (the Eucharist) or Sunday services. However, an increasingly secular society undermines the concept of worship as we know it. For the sake of review, here is how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks about worship. Notice how worship is connected with adoration. Note, too, how Jesus links worship with serving God and God alone:

> #2096 **Adoration** is the first act of the **virtue of religion**. To adore God is to **acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master** of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve,"[1] says Jesus citing Deuteronomy.
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> #2097 **To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name.** The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world. (2807)
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> 2135 "You shall worship the Lord your God" (Mt 4:10**). Adoring God, praying to him, offering him the worship that belongs to him, and fulfilling the promises and vows made to him are acts of the virtue of religion**, **which fall under obedience to the first commandment**."

Notice the reference to the virtue of religion in #2135. A virtue is "a habitual and firm disposition to do the good**.**"[2] According to Joseph F. Delany, "The virtue of religion is linked to the moral virtues and seen as an expression of the cardinal virtue of justice since by it we give God what is due to Him. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that it ranks first among moral virtues. A religious attitude towards God is essentially the product of our recognition of His sovereign majesty and our absolute dependence on Him."[3]

I want you to contrast the above references to worship in the catechism with what Dr. Matthew Petrusek, a presenter for the *Word on Fire Institute*, proposes as his definition of secularism. He begins with a consideration of materialism which he describes as "…the view that what fundamentally defines existence, including human existence, is matter and only matter—no soul, no spirit, no transcendent love, certainly no immaterial God. Just stuff…Secularism is the name we give to the social, cultural, moral, and even political landscape that materialism generates."

In short, since God no longer exists within a secular mindset, or if the existence of God is admitted but has no actual involvement in His creation, then it stands to reason that God is no longer the center of our lives and the focus of our worship. Since nature abhors a vacuum, we humans have filled the void and become "god" because everything revolves around us and satisfying our needs. We have assumed for ourselves the prerogatives that belong to God.

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[1] Cf. Deut 6:4-5

[2] The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines virtue as **"**a habitual and firm disposition to do the good**."**

[3] "Virtue of Religion", Catholic Answers: https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/virtue-of-religion.

Here is a quick test to see if you have been infected (under the influence) by a secular mindset. Some may feel upset, angry, uncomfortable, or combative when reading these words, God's *sovereign majesty*, our *absolute dependence on Him*, the *nothingness of the creature, and God as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists*. That might be the influence of a secular way of thinking.

Don't be too hard on yourself. We can't help but breathe in a secular mindset or worldview entirely inimical for fostering a sense of mystery and worship necessary to "praise and exalt God and to humble ourselves, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name." (CCC #2097) I liken secularism to carbon monoxide poisoning. One of its casualties is the desire and need to worship God.

When we habitually miss Mass on Sundays other than because of illness, old age, work, or other extenuating circumstances, we treat God unjustly and rebel by consciously choosing to disobey the Fourth Commandment: Remember to keep holy the Lord's day. (Exodus 20:8) Rebellion, assuming for ourselves the prerogatives that belong to God by determining if or how often we will worship on Sundays, is what we call sin. Every sin is a participation in that original sin of Adam and Eve, who determined they would be the ones to decide what they will and will not do relative to eating from the tree in the middle of the garden and not God. One of the tenets of secularity is, "It's my life, and I will live it my way," which echoes our first parents' hubris. That is not how a creature should speak to its Creator.

To me, a clear sign that the virtue of religion is on life support is how people criticize the Mass. "It is boring or dull." "I don't like the music." "The homilies say nothing." "It's always the same thing." "There is not enough variety." "I don't like the priest." "It doesn't feed me emotionally or spiritually." "I can't stay awake." "My mind wanders." "The priest is too old and can't relate to the youth." "I resent being forced to go." "All they want is money." "I don't get anything out of it." "It's a waste of time." "They're all hypocrites." "I won't go to church until they change (insert here a doctrine or Church practice)." These are among the common complaints about Sunday Mass we most likely have heard or even said ourselves at some point.

In these criticisms of going to Mass, who is the center of our attention? Who do we want to please? What is the object of our worship? How do we evaluate the worthwhileness of worshipping at Mass? What is our motivation to go to Mass or worship? The above questions have already given us the answer. The center, focus, or object of our worship is no longer God but ourselves. We evaluate worship by what we get out of it. Appropriating to ourselves what we owe to God is called idolatry.

Most of us are not aware that this shift has taken place. That is why I compare secularism to carbon monoxide poisoning that permeates everything and kills our desire and need to worship God. Good Catholics can attend Mass on Sundays with a vague sense of being spiritually ill. However, they can misdiagnose the above criticisms of the Mass as being the cause of their discontent. Fix those, and everything will be fine.

The reality is that those criticisms are symptoms of a deadly spiritual illness that has contaminated their souls. If unaddressed, they will have morphed into spiritual zombies, alive physically while their souls are already dead or on life-support.

God commands us to remember to keep the Lord's day holy. Note that God does not suggest, invite, or recommend that we worship him. Why? Well, first, God does not need our worship. The Church reminds us of that truth in one of the prefaces at Mass, where the priest acknowledges that "our praise adds

nothing to your [God's] greatness."[4] However, God recognizes that ***we*** need to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master (CCC #2096), with respect and absolute submission. (CCC #2097) Why? Because "the worship of the one God sets [us] free from turning in on ourselves, from the slavery of sin and the ***idolatry*** of the world." (CCC #2807)

The praise and worship of God inoculates us from becoming infected by the debilitating effects of secularism. God wants to save us from becoming "spiritual zombies" and save the world from being under the power of sin and death. His vision for us human beings is best described by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who wrote, "The glory of God is human beings fully alive." That can happen only when we worship correctly and give glory to God.

That should come as no surprise to Marists. As the Catholic catechism points out, "To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name."

[4] Common Preface IV