

The legacy of religion, what do we leave for the next generation of Catholics?

A few years ago, one of my oldest friends and mentor emailed me inquiring about my faith and being Catholic. He went on to explain that he had been struggling for some time with changes the church he belonged to for most of his life was making. He did not elaborate much on the changes, but from what I gathered, he was concerned that the church was trying to adapt to better fit society's demands, as opposed to standing for what he believed were fundamental truths and ideals.

It took me the rest of the day and most of the evening to gather my thoughts before I was able to respond. At first I was a little surprised by the inquiry. We were close, but in a professional way, and although we both knew each other was active in our own churches, we did not typically talk religion. As I sat down to type my response, it dawned on me that my friend was not so much inquiring about my being catholic, but more how I stay a committed Catholic. This was typical of the way this man challenged me throughout my professional career, questioning my decisions, motivations, and testing my commitment to an idea or process. You see the irony of the question is that he knew we landed on opposite sides of the very social and cultural issues his church, and mine, are facing. He is a traditionalist, with conservative views on politics, family, love, and religion, and I, a progressive.

Against faltering attendance, reduced contributions, and a litany of social pressures, his church was questioning its course, its doctrine. My friend was questioning his commitment to the church. Knowing where I stood on different social and political issues, he knew I faced those types of challenges every day, just from the opposite position.

In my response, I reflected on the words a priest once shared with me, "Anything that lasts a long time will have good and bad times, but it lasts because it serves the people and God." I went on to explain that I believed our church was good, and did good, and despite my disagreement with some of the social positions of the Catholic church, I feel at home. The ancient history, the rituals, the prayers, and even our storied past melds well with my old artist soul.

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How does this relate to the legacy we leave for the next generation of faithful? I think it represents what our church is, split between two worlds, an institution with one leg in the ancient, and one leg in the present. The structure, rituals, doctrine, the Vatican itself—all harken back to the beginning of the church, to the very days when Jesus walked

with the apostles. The local church family, our pastors, lay staff, and parishioners deal with the issues of our time, of our neighborhood, and working together to set a new course for today and tomorrow.

We must preserve the ancient beauty that is the Catholic church, the foundation and ideal from which our religion is built, all while embracing our diversity, listening to different viewpoints to challenge one another, to forge something better for everyone, to be good and to do good things. This Easter take the time to pray for each other; offer a hand, a smile, an embrace. Love each other; demand better for each other. Support the church and give to each other.

God bless this St. Mark's family.

Written by Stephen Waite, a member of our Stewardship Committee

