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CHURCHES MATTER

# Connect!

Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, August 30, 2015

Dialogue at the Table

## This Sunday's Scripture Readings

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/083015.cfm>

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23



Over the past several years, we have heard the term “cafeteria Catholic” employed in a variety of ways. In more conservative circles, it is largely viewed through negative lenses referring to individuals who want to pick and choose the type of “Catholicism” that suits them, thus “watering down” the real thing. In a recent issue of *U.S. Catholic*, Isabella R. Moyer contributed an insightful article entitled “[Proud to be a Cafeteria Catholic](#)” that is worthy of attention. Often, when people want to stay minimally connected to something, they

find ways to do so. In that vein, there are “Catholics” who are marginally connected to the church and remain that way because of issues with church teaching and practice. These “cafeteria Catholics” have a self-preserving agenda behind their position and use their opinions to justify their occasional practice. But there is another kind of “cafeteria Catholic” who is not marginalized and very much in our pews. In fact, they can be found in some bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay leaders, and committed lay parishioners. They are *not* marginalized nor serving a self-preserving agenda. They are simply struggling with reality as it presents itself and Church teaching as it is taught, finding difficulty if not with “what” is taught then with “how” it is taught. It is to this group of “cafeteria Catholics” to which we can turn our attention as they are motivated by devotion and love.

If our association with the Catholic Church is heavily sided on the dos and don'ts, then we most assuredly will miss the real point of all of this business. While there is no doubt a timeless permanence to many of the teachings held to be true by the church (Jesus Christ is both God and man) there are some that are open to discussion and evolution (mandatory celibacy for priests). Even with those that are indelible and permanent, each new unfolding age requires that

they be taught and communicated in new and engaging ways. As Moyer points out, “gone are the days of conversion by fear.”

How do we feel about Jesus and his relationship with his Jewish community? We have seen him defiantly cure people on the Sabbath, exalting a Samaritan for doing what a Jew would never think of doing, and in today’s Gospel from Mark challenging the Pharisees with their longstanding tradition- and Scripture-based purification rituals to consider that they may be missing the point. We often judge and label people who are closely and intimately associated with the Catholic Church who struggle, question, and find themselves distanced from certain Church teachings as heretical “cafeteria Catholics.” Is Jesus a heretical Jew? It can be assumed that his death on a cross had something to do with folks who thought precisely that!

In his simple yet delightful encyclical, [\*Laudato Si'\*](#), Pope Francis calls for dialogue among all parties of interest in this discussion. Whether one agrees with his opinion is of little consequence to his rightly promoted challenge that the church has a place at the table of this discussion. Dialogue. Perhaps these committed “cafeteria Catholics” are not heretics at all, but prophets. It is quite plausible that they see something that others may not be able to see and experience, something that deserves a valued and respectful place at the discussion table of the church. Questioning produces growth. Just because someone questions or disagrees with a certain teaching or application does not mean that one ought to be excommunicated and sentenced to a life of penance before returning to the fold!

The statutes and decrees of which Moses speaks in our first reading from Deuteronomy serve as a baseline for believers. These must not be added to or subtracted from. They are the basic guidelines necessary to maintain proper order in our relationships with God, ourselves, and one another. However, generation to generation must revisit them and discuss them in light of the learning that has occurred and advancements made. This whole law is based on “justice” and discerning that for a particular community requires sincere dialogue not on the part of just a few but the whole. Psalm 15 gives us a great measuring stick with which to assess our behavior. “Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue” is the one who is just. We must remember that we always stand before the truth and can never fully possess it in any human precepts. We are always evolving toward the one Presence and universal unifying Godhead.

Religion needs rules and regulations for organization and structure. Whether we like it, we need rules too for guidance and direction. But religion is never just about the rules, and one’s appropriation of a religion’s ideologies and theologies cannot be measured in black and white. St. James tells us this clearly today: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” There is the litmus test for one who claims to be Christian. Ours is a mission journey as Pope Francis consistently tells us. It is not just about my personal salvation. We live in the world but also apart from it and must constantly be reminded of where our true home is. The values we are meant to cultivate and teach are not secular in nature but directed at those things that help us along the road of conversion, keeping us from falling victim to the things that can defile.

For those who love the church and want to see it grow and become simpler and focused, know that you stand with One who understands, our founder Jesus Christ who himself sought a purer and simpler understanding of God. Moyer reminds us of this teaching: “God loves you. What does God expect in return? Love God and love others. It seems so simple.” It seems simple because it is. Pope Francis gets it. Let us offer true compassion to others, especially the

prophets in our midst, giving them a respectful ear and a full voice as we all accept the invitation to dine at the great table of love.

(For further reflection on this topic see: <http://www.uscatholic.org/church/2008/07/cafeteria-catholics>.)

Rev. Mark S. Suslenko

## PRAYER

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My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me. Nor do I really know myself.  
And the fact that I think I am following your will  
Does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
Does in fact please you.  
And I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this,  
You will lead me by the right road  
Though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore I will trust you always  
Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death  
I will not fear for you are ever with me.  
And you will never leave me to face my struggles alone.

—Prayer by Thomas Merton from *Thoughts in Solitude*.

## NOTICES

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### **CATECHETICAL SUNDAY—September 20, 2015**

The USCCB offers resources for parishes and families to celebrate Catechetical Sunday on September 20. The theme for this year is “Safeguarding the Dignity of Every Human Person.” For more information and parish resources, visit: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/index.cfm>.

### **WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES**

In preparation for the upcoming World Meeting of Families — Philadelphia 2015, LPi has created a cover for parishes to use to encourage prayers for its success. The cover is available at no charge via LPi’s [Art & Media Portal](#). Current customers can find more versions by logging in and searching keyword “WMOF.”

### **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE CARE OF CREATION**

Pope Francis has announced an annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, to be celebrated on September 1. You can view the announcement [here](#). LPi has created a bulletin cover for the day of prayer; download it from our home page at [www.4LPi.com](http://www.4LPi.com).

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