



BECAUSE VIBRANT
CHURCHES MATTER

Connect!

Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, September 13, 2015

Who Do You Say that I Am?

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/091315.cfm>

Isaiah 50:5-9a

James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35



A new [Pew Forum Study looking at the views of American Catholics](#) on family life, sexuality, and Catholic identity has concluded that 45% of Americans are Catholic or are “connected to Catholicism.” It gauged people’s views of the topics mentioned, but in some ways, the figure of 45% is one of the most interesting findings. The 45% are comprised of those who claim to be Catholic now, those who were raised in the faith and now no longer practice, and those who claim a “cultural connection to Catholicism.” Sherry Weddell pointed out in an [article for](#)

[Aleteia](#) that the study showed a large number of those who no longer actively practice their Catholic faith are “willing to be persuaded back into the pews, with the right outreach.”

Multiple reasons can account for why people drift away from the church, and the right word to use here is *drift*, for the experience of leaving the church does not happen overnight. Some leave because of conflicts and abuses of power by priests, but the vast majority never had such an experience. Most are like people you and I know who have drifted away over time due to apathy and disinterest. While some connection to a Catholic heritage is important to many, connections to a formed community seem less important, or at least the numbers make it seem that way. The 2013 study and book, [American Catholics in Transition](#), reported that the “pre-Vatican II generation is the only group where more than half (54%) attends weekly Mass.” They state that for most who identify as Catholic, monthly Mass attendance is the new norm.

All people have a need to belong. [Psychologists point out](#) belonging is part of what makes us human. Those who drift away still want to belong. They have just chosen to belong to something

else, and usually it is a group of people who has similar beliefs. But if they still label themselves in some way Catholic, they must continue to hold some core doctrinal beliefs. The question is, do they grasp the true implications of those beliefs? For as we can see in our modern times, religious belief can be one of the most powerful forces on earth.

Jesus understood the power of faith when he questioned his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" If they truly believed that he was the Christ, the anointed one, the One for whom they had longed, they would be able to accept his difficult command:

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

Those who would be able to accept their crosses and give away their lives, particularly in the persecutions that followed Jesus' death and resurrection, not only believed that they had met the Christ, they knew they belonged to him. The apostles, the other disciples close to Jesus, and those who would join this "movement" sometimes called The Way, would have had a sense of being transformed not just by their belief, but also by acceptance by and belonging to this new community of faith.

Jesus still asks today, "Who do you say that I am?" Those who give the right answer yet choose to not live out their faith are like those who have cheated on a test: they know the answer, but do not know why it is the right answer. By the grace of God some will be transformed by simple belief in isolation from others, but without community, most will not. Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy, the great stewardship leader, said, "Belonging leads to belief." The majority of those cultural Catholics maintain some belief, but they are unsure of why they still do. They also maintain some form of Catholic identity, perhaps because the psychologists are correct and they have a need to belong. Yet they are still drifting, unsure of really their place in the grand scheme of things.

Pope Francis is issuing a [Jubilee Year of Mercy](#) and what better time to reach out to our brothers and sisters who are drifting? We need to throw open the doors of our churches and offer the greatest of hospitality, like the father who rejoiced at the return of his prodigal son. We need to offer healing for wounds caused by the church, as well as those wounds that occurred when we could not be there in their lives. We need to fill our churches with a joy of the Lord that is contagious and life-giving. We need to reach out and let those who have left our midst know that we have eagerly awaited their return. For then, when asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" they will not only know the answer, but will know why it is the answer and the implications of such an answer. Then, more will be able to accept the crosses and give away their lives so that our church and world can be transformed.

Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;

the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error: let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm,
may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.
Amen.

—*Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee.* © Copyright Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization, Vatican State. All rights reserved.

NOTICES

DIOCESAN FISCAL MANAGERS CONFERENCE, September 27–30, Atlanta

The Diocesan Fiscal Managers Conference (DFMC) will take place in Atlanta from September 27–30, 2015. The keynote speaker this year will be the Most Revered Wilton D. Gregory, Archbishop of Atlanta. LPi will be attending DFMC as well, so if you're attending, be sure to stop by our booth to say hi! More information is available at <http://www.4lpi.com/live-events/events-and-conferences/>.

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.”

Visit the LPi website for information on services and publications to build a vibrant parish.

www.4LPi.com

Liturgical Publications Inc

2875 S. James Drive

New Berlin, WI 53151

(800) 950-9952 ext. 2469

Send email address changes to:

lpiconnections@4LPi.com

To opt out of receiving this midweek reflection as part of your *Connect!* subscription, contact: lpiconnections@4LPi.com

Copyright ©2015, Liturgical Publications Inc. All rights reserved.