

Parish Priests Are the Cure to the Crisis: Part 3 The Impossible Dream

by Tate Hilgefert

In parts one and two of this series, we discussed the disordered views Catholics hold that prevent them from becoming true friends of Christ, and what it will take to lead a parish out of the current crisis. In this final article, we will discuss the impossible dream: what a parish ought to be. Over the past half a century, we've gotten so far off the true path it can be difficult to imagine, but *with God nothing will be impossible*.

The bells are ringing as you walk into the church on Sunday morning. Your eyes are drawn first to the tabernacle. Gold and beautiful, it sits in a high altar arrayed with statues of saints. As you look left and right, altars honor the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. Between you and all of this transcendent beauty is an altar rail—the place where parishioners kneel before their God to humbly receive Him. You are clearly in God's house—a house of beauty and awe, reverence and piety, joy and peace.

As you look in the pews, you notice a reverent quiet combined with the energy and noise of little ones. Families are aplenty, and kids outnumber the adults. All are dressed in their Sunday best. Veils, missals and rosaries are in abundance. Habited sisters sit in the front row. It is clear that everyone is here for something of great importance.

The bells ring, and everyone stands. The altar boys, clothed in cassock and surplice, lead the procession, followed by a priest who is prepared for battle against the evil one. He is about to celebrate the most beautiful and important event of the week—that which all things center around.

The Mass is a beautiful and reverent worship of the Triune God. The sacred music lifts one out of this world into Heaven. It's an atmosphere where prayer and contemplation come naturally. Prayers rise with incense, and the sound of bells marks the consecration.

At the conclusion of Mass, the congregation kneels down to give thanks to God. Slowly and reverently, they exit the beautiful Church. Outside, kids play, and families converse. Peace, joy, happiness abound. The cares and worries of the world are for another day.

Men are husbands and fathers who love the faith, live it with courage and stand at the head of the family leading them to Heaven. Women are proud to be wives and mothers who stay at home to care for their children. In their homes religious art abounds. Our Lord and His Mother are honored. The Baltimore Catechism is not taboo, but an instrumental tool for passing on the faith, and prayer is woven throughout the day.

In the parish school, the pastor, principal, teachers and parents all share the same mission: training saints for the kingdom of God. Each classroom is named for a saint and includes a crucifix and a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Every subject is oriented toward God and

infused with the Catholic faith. At noon, the bells ring, and the entire school stops to pray the Angelus.

Generosity abounds from the love of God. An overflow of grace from the interior lives of parishioners builds Christ-centered ministries to generously address the needs of the community. Those being helped can genuinely see Christ in those who help them.

A missionary spirit abounds in the parish. The love of Christ and the Catholic faith is carried out to the workplace and to neighbors. The joy and peace in the lives of parishioners is beautiful and attractive, causing many to inquire about the faith. On Easter, many are brought into the Church.

While this dream may seem too far away or even ridiculous to entertain, it's essential to know what we are working towards. Too often, priests begin to compromise and accept the current status. Knowing where one is going and trusting in God to lead is the first step. To think it impossible would be to limit God. Instead, aspire to be one of the saints St. Louis de Montfort predicts: *Almighty God and His holy Mother are to raise up great saints who will surpass in holiness most other saints as much as the cedars of Lebanon tower above little shrubs.*