

## Catholic Faith Catholic Culture

Way back in 1919 a terrible accident occurred in the City of Boston. A tank filled with more than 2 million gallons of Molasses burst, sending a wave of the dense, sticky liquid down the streets of the city and killing 21 people. One can only begin to imagine the horrible sort of death that comes from being submerged in such a substance.

Periodically I have written and spoken of a “Catholic Culture,” as distinct from the Catholic Faith. My personal theory concerning this culture is that its primary dynamic, in the short history of this country, was “assimilation.” While it is true that Catholic leadership created its own great legacy of school systems, hospitals and universities in the name of protecting Catholic identity from the prevailing Protestant culture, the more compelling force in immigrant-Catholic communities was to assimilate into mainstream American Culture.

To some extent, I wonder if this assimilation --- understandable as it is--- caused too much **“hiding of our lamps under bushel baskets.”** In other words, one did not want to appear too “Catholic” at work or school or in the public square, unless one was operating within the Catholic neighborhood or ghetto. This disposition seems to have completely over-ridden any significant dynamic toward evangelizing others. The Faith became the private business of our forebears, and has remained such up to our day.

By the time I came into consciousness about my faith, family devotions were largely abandoned. A vague sense of obligation motivated Church attendance. Post-Vatican II pastors and priests were trying to make the Gospel and the Church “relevant” to the modern times and mentality. Sometimes, in very misguided and silly ways, they were attempting to penetrate a hard shell of routine which had encased the Catholic consciousness. Perhaps, much more successfully, the Charismatic Movement broke-through in the lives of a significant minority but not without some hazards and tensions.

Catholic Culture, as I am using the term, is not only not helpful, it is a terrible obstacle to growth in the Holy Spirit. By this I mean that a robotic, purely

private or purely obligation-driven practice of the faith remains like the *“lamp hidden under a bushel basket.”* However, this bushel basket is not some delicate woven artifact but more like an impenetrable titanium cask.

I once found an expression of this issue on a Catholic Answers message “thread” wherein a Christian of another sort chimed in, (I paraphrase) **“I have never been invited to Church or to a relationship with Jesus by a Catholic.”** When I first read that I knew that it could only be true. I never saw it happen among my Catholic family or friends. We rarely talked about it among ourselves, unless confronted by the shock of someone’s death.

How is it that we devotedly went to Church every week, every Holy Day, every day of Holy Week and, yet, we did not speak the language of faith in everyday life? Herein is our massive challenge! Here is the titanium cask we need to bust through with “intentional discipleship” and renewed zeal for the Gospel and the Sacrament of the Lord!



The buildings we are building are meaningless unless everyone --- all of us --- turn to the Lord to extract us from the thick, paralyzing Molasses of the old Catholic Culture. Will-power is not enough: I’ve tried that over and over again. Programs can’t do it. Slogans and platitudes will not break through. And no amount of money will help.

We must be more than a social club, or a festival or a good-feeling service provider. And, of course, I realize that it is much more than that for many or most. I am just attempting to provoke a sense of urgency in all of us to do whatever it takes to be freed of the molasses and to free the lamp from beneath the titanium cask. Join a faith-sharing group. Come to Adoration and pray with us. Participate in parish programs. In the words of the Apostle, “Now is the time!”