

By
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The Every Catholic Guy

As Venerated as the Shroud of Turin

About fifty years after the religious revolution in Greenland, in the 16th century, a Catholic traveling salesman celebrated Christmas there. He related that all the Catholic priests had either been put to death or banished from that cold, barren arctic land. Only a few Catholics, scattered about the country, had remained loyal to our holy and ancient faith. Every year they met for the celebration of Christmas on the eve of the feast.

Greenland is cold, desolate, and an arctic night lasts for months. Days ahead of the Christmas celebration, warmly dressed and provided with lanterns, they set out for the place where they'd meet. They plowed their way through the deep snow toward a little hut belonging to a Catholic family. When they were all together at midnight on Christmas Eve, a roll call was made to be sure that no one was missing. Then a venerable old man in his seventies—his hair gray, hands trembling, and his figure stooped with age—stood at a small table in a corner of the room. After an opening prayer and a short welcome, he opened a drawer on the table and took out a little box. From the box he withdrew a corporal—the cloth the priest lays the sacred body on after the consecration. It was yellow and tattered with age. The old man held it up reverently for everyone to see, then he began to speak with very deep emotion. He said, “My dear friends, on this sacred linen the last Holy Mass was said in this country fifty years ago. I served at that Mass. This holy and sacred cloth is all that remains to us of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The body and blood of Jesus Christ rested on this linen. Let's kneel and thank God for letting us have at least this dear and precious relic. Let's beg Him to send us priests soon, so we can again have the sacred body and blood of our Lord.”

Then all the assembled Catholics, tears streaming down their faces, fell on their knees before that holy linen that held the sacrament of our Lord's love for us.

These people wanted to make the Mass their treasure, but they'd been deprived of it. We have the Mass, but we probably seldom think of it as a treasure. They only had a tattered corporal that Jesus had been laid on, and they prized it as much as they would've prized the Shroud of Turin. But do we have the love for our Lord those Greenlanders had? I really don't think so.

Communion lines are long, with virtually everyone in the church going up to receive, while the confession lines are very short or virtually non-existent. Statistically, many communicants are in civil (bad) marriages, or they're steeped in mortal sin because of their use of artificial contraception. St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:27, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the

Lord.” So we not only receive unworthily when we receive while in a bad marriage or using contraception, but we commit the additional mortal sin of sacrilege.

We don’t really love the few children we do have. Rather than showing them real love by teaching them about the Mass and how to respect it, we bring along their toys and finger foods so they can be occupied and entertained. We need to be more like good Queen Blanche, the mother of King St. Louis of France. With little Louis on her knee she said, “I would rather see you a thousand times dead at my feet than to know you had offended God with one mortal sin!” I guess that’s why he’s a saint.

Quite a number of us receive Communion then dart out the door to go about our day. We commit two mortal sins when we do this. We’re obligated to attend Mass on holy days of obligation and Sundays, but we fail to fulfill that obligation when we leave before the Mass has ended. All it takes to avoid risking eternity in hell is an extra ten minutes. Of course, the other mortal sin committed when we dart out the door before Mass has ended is the sin of sacrilege, because the holy Mass is being abused.

Hey, the rest of us needn’t feel smug about this. We actually often participate in the sin of those who race for the door after Communion. With rare exception, I’m sure most or all of us know people who regularly commit this sin, and these people are likely those who won’t bother reading this. Anyone in so big of a hurry to get out to the parking lot is too busy, you know. So it’s up to us to help them... lest we participate in their sin and commit a sin by omission. One of the seven spiritual works of mercy—works that we’re all morally obligated to perform—is to admonish the sinner. I know, I know; that’s scary. It’s uncomfortable to admonish a sinner, especially when we know our own lives don’t make us poster kids for sainthood, but it’s love in its purest form. Remember that Jesus called people liars and hypocrites, but He loved them. The telling of the truth is love, but sometimes conveying truth and demonstrating that love can be difficult.

A motto I use—I prefer to call it my battle cry—in *The Cantankerous Catholic* podcast is “Comfort and Conviction don’t live on the same block!” We either want our comfort or we hold to our convictions. We can’t have them both at the same time, because comfort and conviction are diametrically opposed to one another. Comfort is a good way to risk eternity in hell, or at the very least suffer a very long time in purgatory. Conviction, on the other hand, can be a good way to risk the possibility of dying for our Catholic faith—especially in this era when Christianity is being so heavily persecuted here at home and abroad. I know; I’ve faced that possibility several times. (That’s what happens when you attempt to evangelize members of a large congregation of Satan worshippers.) Neither comfort nor conviction offer options that are very appealing to us. Conviction means suffering in this life. Comfort eventually causes immense suffering as well, but only in the next phase of life; i.e., life after death.

All of the bad things I’ve mentioned in this installment—bad marriages, artificial contraception, failing to be good parents, receiving Communion and darting out the door, sacrilege, and failing to perform a spiritual work of mercy—is all comfort. These are the things we want in this life, or we wouldn’t do them. But having my comfort is dangerous. Conviction, on the other hand, may not have very appealing consequences in this life, but there is real comfort in conviction because we can realize that this life is very, very short. How short? Well, there’s a line in the old Protestant hymn *Amazing Grace* that says, “When we’ve been there 10,000 years... we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’ve first begun.” Think about it.