

INTRODUCTION

1. Our Church and nation have different missions, but require many of the same characteristics
 - a. Our Church requires us to be faithful citizens, carrying its teachings into our homes, the public square, even the voting booth.
 - b. Our nation requires us to be faithful citizens; endowed with inalienable rights by our Creator. As John Adams said, echoing Washington, Jefferson, Franklin etc., “Our Constitution is made for a moral and religious people, it is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Christianity is to Democracy what a bridle is to a horse- it tames it and aims it.
 - c. To flourish, our nation needs virtuous people, and our Church is commissioned to create them. As Bernie’s friend and esteemed Catholic writer George Weigel said, “Freedom must be **tethered to TRUTH**, and ordered to goodness, if freedom is not to become its own undoing.”

Our Church is the tether that creates the order.

THE BATTLE

War is a metaphor that is often overused, but the Church on Earth is referred to in Christian Theology as “The Church Militant.” We are in a battle with the devil for human souls, and the Father of Lies never rests.

The devastation has been immense. The Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate at Georgetown (CARA) reports that since 2000, 15 million Catholics have left the faith, RE participation has dropped 25%, Catholic School attendance down 20%, infant Baptisms down 30% and Sacramental marriages down 40%. In society we are all aware of the skyrocketing acts of despair such as suicide, and overdoses.

Everyone here is likely to have a very personal story of woe, and loss of faith of loved ones.

CAUSES of CHURCH DECLINE- Many Theories

Bernie gave us an article last time that pointed the finger at the loss of the transcendent, the supernatural. We have become temporal, or secular in our faith.

Some point to the scandal of sexual abuse of minors, the cover-ups, the homosexual activity in seminaries and rectories, and their cover-ups.

Another study by CARA of 18-25 year-olds revealed that the average age someone reported as when they decided to leave the faith was 13 years old! The main reason they gave: the incompatibility of faith and science, as learned in schools. The Augustine Institute found that of the 1,000,000 Catholics baptized around the year 2000, only 500,000 received Confirmation.

Poor formation and catechesis at home and at school is another reason we are failing. We do not know how to answer our children's questions.

Pew Research found that a shocking 69% of self-professed Catholics believe the Eucharist is merely symbolic of Christ's Body and Blood. That points to both a loss of the sense of the transcendent AND a catechism and formation process that is broken.

Cardinal Sarah -"The West no longer knows what it is, because it does not know, and does not want to know what shaped it, what constituted it, what it was and what it is. This **self-asphyxiation** leads naturally to a **decadence** that opens the way to new, **barbaric** civilizations."

WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE of MEN?

Look in pews at Church, look in the classrooms of Religious Ed, look in the faculty lounges of our schools. Mostly women. The women are stepping up, just as they did by staying with Jesus as he was crucified while the men hid. Sadly, according to Pew Research, men make up 57% of the "nones" (the religiously unaffiliated) but only 45% of the Catholics.. We men have failed to live up to our baptismal vows as priests, prophets and kings, to protect our children and families from the snares of the devil and raise them in the faith. Where are the men teaching

and leading our families and faith communities? Have our rectories been projecting a robust masculinity? How are the Boy Scouts working out for society?

Look at our society: Just listen to these stats:

Since 1960, the percent of children raised in fatherless homes has gone from less than 5% to about 40%. Children from fatherless homes make up 63% of youth suicides, 90% of runaways, 71% of HS dropouts, 70% of pregnant teens, 80% of rapists with anger problems, 75% of adolescents in chemical abuse centers, and 85% of all youths in prison. Fatherless kids are at double the risk of being victims of child abuse and 92% more likely to get divorced. 82% of mass shooters come from what is called “male dysfunctional” homes. You get the picture. – MEN MATTER.

CS Lewis said: “Christianity, if false, is of no importance. If true, it is of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.” Pew Research reports that only 37% of **Catholic** men say the Catholic faith is even “Very Important.”

The fruits of practicing the faith are well-advertised, and it is why it is in your children’s best interest, and society’s. Practicing the faith is associated with **lower** rates of divorce and suicide and lower rates of depression and abortion and substance abuse, and **higher** rates of educational achievement, and income and self-assessed levels of “Happiness! **If the dad practices his** faith, it increases the chances of the kids practicing by 600%! Men Matter!! Our Church and our country need a masculine revival. We are living in unprecedented unholy times where over 30% of young people profess no religion. **We must bring unprecedented holiness to combat it.** The material poverty that was so obvious in our youth has yielded to a spiritual poverty that plagues the youth of today.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?

Men and women are equal in dignity, and have equally necessary, yet vastly different roles. Tom McCauley explained that we are a *Marian and Petrine Church*, one that began with Mary’s feminine receptivity.....and then spread via Peter’s masculine boldness. Both are vital and complementary. But remember, it is men who perform over 90% of the “Samaritan saves” in this country, make up 99% of those killed in battle, fires, and police work, MEN MATTER!!

Viva le difference! Christ told us to love one another as I have loved you. **He died for us!!** Saint Paul told us to love our wives as Christ loves the Church. We must die to ourselves so that **they**, and others, can flourish. This takes meekness, which is what you get when you combine great power with great humility.

There is currently a lot of confusion in the Divine Dance between man and women and we do not have the time to unpack it all here, but it is safe to say that this confusion comes from sin, not from God. As Pope Francis said, our confusion on sexual identity is “an expression of frustration and resignation which seeks to cancel out sexual differences because it no longer knows how to confront it. The removal of difference **creates a problem**, not a solution.” We are called to be protectors of the feminine, protecting their dignity and vulnerability. Yet by virtue of the sexual revolution, and its sister radical feminism, we have instead become predators- We have subjected women to 60 million abortions since 1973, we have degraded them via pornography, we use contraception as a tool for using them for our pleasure, we have increased divorces dramatically, reduced marriages, and left 40% of children to be raised without their dads at home. Our society is dealing with the wreckage.

Mike Pence was mocked for showing great respect for the dignity of women, especially his wife. We too need to be unrepentant Catholic Gentlemen, by treating marriage and women with great respect. The fuller response according to Bishop Olmstead is to “Truly encounter Christ (the perfect man) in the Mass when we receive the very gift of him in the Eucharist.” We must awaken the sense of transcendence that is the Mass. We men must re-learn to understand the fullness and power that is our Mass and Eucharist. We reduced His Real Presence to service projects and being nice. Now, only 45% of Catholics believe in Hell! We reduced God and dismissed the devil, filling the void with sports, politics, pleasure, and narcissism.

St. Ignatius Loyola gave us his spiritual exercises to help us break our worldly attachments. Ignatius had been a successful man and sought glory in the world and in battle. He was converted by reading about the lives of Christ and the saints. We have many masculine saints to inspire us such as Saints Joseph, Peter, Augustine, George, Francis, Benedict, Maximilian Kolbe, John Paul. Remember, our brothers are being tortured and murdered in Africa and the Middle East at horrific genocidal rates, yet they will not renounce Christ. Let us look to them and the saints for courage. All that we may be asked to do is defend our Church **at a cocktail party.**

We must prepare for battle. Jesus entered the desert for 40 days of prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting are great starts! Jesus showed us where Satan would attack us- to our temptations for the passions of the flesh, for possessiveness, and pride. These were the battles Jesus faced, and these are the ones we must face. To combat them we must build up a strong interior life. Paul tells us to “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ... take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

We all have weaknesses, **perhaps even unresolved sins**, that hold us back. We must confront them as we would confront any adversary and for this we use the power of confession. We **MUST** confront our wounds and sins. Pope Pius XII spoke a prophetic word: “Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin.”

We must form bands of brothers, like this one. We need to be visible men. Men bond shoulder to shoulder with a shared sense of purpose. Men need men to hold each other accountable. I talk to Dom about this a lot. I ask, does anyone get offended when you feed them or clothe them, or perform any corporal work of mercy? Of course not. But try the Spiritual Works of Mercy, to “instruct the ignorant, admonish a sinner, counsel the doubtful. ...whoa boy. Fireworks!! See a woman at Mass with the family but dad’s not there? Call him and invite him for coffee or a beer. See where it goes. We are teammates, we are in foxholes together- We

must love and support each other. Sometimes this requires fraternal correction, but it requires that we first establish a relationship of trust.

Even St. Peter, the rock of our Church, needed to be corrected by St. Paul. “When Peter came to Antioch, I told him face to face that he was wrong...Peter was afraid of the Jews and soon stopped eating with Gentiles...But when I saw that they were not really obeying the truth that is in the good news, I corrected Peter in front of everyone”

If Peter can stand corrected, we all can!

BIGGEST OBSTACLE

It seems that one of the biggest obstacles, particularly for those who came of age in the 1960's and 1970's, is to understand and accept the role of the Church. All Christians agree on the tenets of the Apostle's creed. Where the Catholic Church **most profoundly** stands in defiance to the now over 45,000 different Protestant denominations, is that Scripture does not stand alone, sola scriptura, to be interpreted by the individual as he or she sees fit. The Catholic Church, via the Magisterium, produces authoritative teachings that are BINDING on Catholics in the areas of Faith and morals. The Church gives us the Magisterium, and it **IS** the only **true and full** deposit of the faith that exists on earth.

As soon as we begin to criticize the Church for its teaching on faith or morals, such as contraception, abortion, the male priesthood, or the sanctity of marriage, we are **undermining its authority**. It is easy to then understand how our progeny may reject Mass, or the divinity of the Eucharist, or even God, if we have established that you get to pick and choose where the Church is right and where it is wrong. Try and run a company or business where the employees can openly criticize the CEO and the board, ignore its decisions, and encourage others to do the same. It will go out of business.

I have gone through my own trials and tribulations on Church teachings, whether it be contraception or Marian Devotions. Others may wrestle with the issue of no female priests. I urge you to do what I have done: I kept the dissent to myself (or I shared it with my wife or confessors, but in the spirit of seeking wisdom) In each case, I realized that on one side of the argument was the Church instituted by Christ, guided by the holy Spirit, led by successors of Peter who walked with Jesus, informed by brilliant minds like Augustine, Aquinas, Newman, Leo, John Paul, and Benedict. On the other side, was....ME, (and the editorial page of the New York Times). So, I prayed, read the catechism, read the encyclicals that discussed the issue, read defenses by people much smarter than I. And I prayed some more. In each case I came to see the beautiful and joyful wisdom of the Church's teaching and it enhanced my life. We must be prepared to defend our Church, which is **THE TRUTH** in a confused world of **MY TRUTH**, and **YOUR TRUTH**.

As Bishop Barron says in the book *A Letter to a Suffering Church* that Bernie gave us today, "remember that the Church is an organism, not an organization. It is the mystical Body of Christ. Those who have been **grafted on to Jesus Christ** are the eyes, ears, hands, feet, and hearts through which Jesus continues his properly subversive and re-creative work of the world." We must separate that transcendent entity from the people who are populating the rectories, chanceries and Vatican. They will come and go, and some will be great, saints even, and some will be evil. Focus on Christ in the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. In this room, in our congregations, in our families, and in our communities are broken, confused, stubborn and wounded men. Remember as Pope Francis said, our Church is a field hospital. We must approach with mercy and compassion, but both are forged by truth. St. Maximillian Kolbe said "We love our families, friends and closest neighbors, but do we have a place in our hearts for the poor souls who are tangled in the snares of heresy or schism? Let us open our hearts to them"

Do you **REALLY** believe that Christ died, rose, ascended and **LIVES** in the Eucharist and that the Church **IS** his mystical body?..... Then we must act that way and defend it with maximum ferocity!

Who do YOU say that HE IS?

SO WHAT NOW?

First, we need to build ourselves into virtuous men. Guys that play in the NFL, become Navy Seals or philharmonic musicians, did not happen by just showing up. It takes a **huge** amount of work and relentless dedication to getting the little things right. Bear Bryant said that “It is not the will to win that matters, it is the will **to prepare** to win.” We must have the will, and encourage each other, to prepare to win. Here are some suggestions:

Pray every day. Become a friend of Jesus. Spend time with Him. And, pray before meals in public and in private. Never be ashamed to thank God, or afraid to ask what HE wants from you. ***“I used to believe that prayer changes things. But now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.” – St. Teresa of Calcutta***

Do an examination of conscience every night. That it is our game film. Look over the mistakes and work to correct them. See your triumphs and repeat them!

Go to Mass- and be prepared. Get there early, stay to the end. Dress accordingly. Every Mass is a miracle, an encounter between us and the Divine. Treat it that way.

Read the Bible. The Augustine Institute, and other outfits on line, have Bible in a Year programs. I did that last year and it was great. 15 minutes a day. Let God talk to you.

Read catechism and good books about the saints, faith, and men of faith. Get to know what our Church teaches and why. You could also tune into FORMED.org, or get videos and content from Ascension Press or Dynamic Catholic. Lots of great stuff out there.

Keep the Sabbath. Spend time with family, friends, the Mass, and enjoy peaceful recreation. Turn off the tv, and digital and social media.

Go to Confession every month. Repent, repent, repent. It is how we prepare for the way of the Lord. It is how we get the grace to persevere.

Turn off the noise!! Politics, as presented by the media, has become the new religion and it honors an evil god. Marshall McLuhen said, “The modern media of communication are engaged in a Luciferian conspiracy against the truth.” Studies of the “Perception Gap” show that the more media and social media you consume, the more likely your perception of the truth will differ from the actual truth.

In 2 Timothy we hear, “Preach the word... **reprove, rebuke, and encourage with every form of patient instruction.** For the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires. So they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” Turn off the myths! Turn off the noise! Seek the truth and it will set you free!

Build fraternity with other Catholic men. This, TMIY, Cornerstone, Mondays at St. Rose, Tuesdays at St. Catharine. These are all great. So many of you have been involved in Habitat for Humanity, prison and hospital ministry, St. Vincent DePaul, Respect Life, Knights of Columbus, extraordinary ministry of the Eucharist, Mercy Center. I salute you!! How about inviting some of the younger guys to check out one of those ministries, or propose a Theology on Tap, or form some small groups that follow a book or program? Be visible in your journey! Let's get out of the basements not just as individuals, but as a Band of Catholic Brothers with a shared mission!

Archbishop Chaput sums it up: “It means cleaning out the garbage of noise and distraction from our homes. It means building real Christian friendships (and small communities) It means cultivating oases of silence, worship and prayer in our lives. It means fighting death and fear with joy and life, one family at a time, with families sustaining one another against the temptations of weariness and resentment, with a love that is anchored in the **truth about the human person and human relationships.**”

THE FINAL THEMES:

BAND OF BROTHERS: Jesus said, “No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what the master is doing but I have called you friends for all that I have heard from the father I have made known to you.” We are called to friendship with Christ and with each other. A true friendship with a sense of shared mission. As Shakespeare’s Henry the Fifth said at Agincourt,

From this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be rememberèd—

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;

For he to-day that sheds his blood with me

Shall be my brother;

As Proverbs says, “A friend is a friend at all times and a brother is born for times of adversity.” Be brothers to each other, the fallen-away, and the lonely and the vulnerable. It’s rough out there! We need each other. And society needs us strong!

WATCHMEN: One of my favorite manly literary characters is Atticus Finch of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He is a man of great virtue, raising his two children with dignity and humility. My favorite part is the final paragraph, when Atticus has put Scout to bed and entered Jem’s room, who is still unconscious after nearly being killed. The narrator tells us that Atticus would “be there all night, and he’d be there when Jem waked up in the morning.”

There is no greater affirmation of manhood than when those in your charge can rest easy **knowing** you will be there keeping watch.

The original title of that book was *Go Set a Watchman*. In Psalms we are warned to only live in a house built by, and guarded by the Lord, or else “The watchmen keep awake in vain.” In Isaiah the Lord commands, “Go set a watchman, let him report what he sees.” But in Jeremiah the Lord laments that he has set a watchmen over us who blares his trumpet, but “we will not listen.” Men, we are the watchmen meant to protect and guard our families, His Church and His City on the Hill. We need to make sure we have prepared ourselves to listen, to see, to watch over our charges, to lead, and to take action.

Another way to look at it is that we are meant to be the watchmen that tend the beacon of a lighthouse. Our sons, our daughters, our brothers, our sisters, our neighbors are adrift in dark and stormy seas. With our light shining, they have some peace and confidence that they can navigate their way to safety. If we let the light go out, they will be full of fear and confusion with some yelling “this way” and others screaming “no, this way.” Brothers, let us set the watch, let us tend the light of our Church. They may mock us, but our country needs us as beacons as well. Like Colonel Jessup from *A Few Good Men*.. “ We WANT you on that wall. We NEED you on that wall.”

INTO THE BREACH: Our Church and our country are on loan to us from future generations. We are their stewards. What shape will they be in when we return them? We are born into **this** time, in **this** moment, where 2000 years of wisdom and 200 years of constitutional order has been abruptly turned upside down, with no regard for the consequences. Our grandchildren are being taught **lies** that human life has no inherent dignity or value, that male and female is not how God created them, but however **you** happen to feel. They are taught that marriage is not a covenant between man, woman and God where two become one, in an indissoluble bond, and become co-creators of human life in the image and likeness of our God. Instead they are taught marriage is really only about feelings and sexual desire. They are taught that to be a man is to be toxic. They are living in a time where to act like a true man, to uphold Church teachings, gets you labeled a sexist, a bigot, and one who deserves to be shamed and put out of business. Well men, Jesus said many times, **Be Not Afraid**.

Once again, Shakespeare’s Henry V implores us,

Once more **into the breach**, dear friends, once more;

Or close the wall up with our (**CATHOLIC**) dead.

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man

As modest stillness and humility;

But when the blast of war blows in our ears,

Then imitate the action of the tiger. . .

Jesus sends us out as sheep among wolves, but with his armor, we are indeed like Tigers.

We are called, as Bishop Olmstead phrases it, to “step into the breach.” We are called by St. Paul to “put on the armor of God,” and to “Stand firm against the tactics of the devil.” Choose to be warriors for Christ who gave us his Great Commission: Go make disciples of all people! The Church calls our moment “The New Evangelization” and we are called to make disciples by any means at our disposal: As George Weigel said, “the Church does not **HAVE** a mission, the Church **IS** a mission.” And its truth must be affirmed and defended over and over again. Our nation needs us **to be**, and to build, moral and religious people.

DECISION TIME: We have fought the good fight. Will we finish the race?

In the 1952 classic Western *High Noon*, Marshal Will Kane has a choice to make. The rule of law has unraveled, and Outlaw Frank Miller and his gang are arriving on the noon train. Kane asks the fine men of the town to stand with him, to defend their town. Instead, they walk away and leave him, either through fear, or the futile hope of keeping the peace, or out of allegiance to Frank Miller himself.

The marshal, who was scheduled to leave town with his new bride, is instead compelled to stay and step into the street. His duty and his office compel him. High Noon is High Noon **because** the marshal shows up.

Men, can we strip away whatever foolish pride is holding us back, whatever wounds, anger or fears, and fulfill the duty of our Baptismal vows and our citizenship and do **whatever is needed** to cultivate and safeguard the next generation.? Will we humble ourselves? Will we reveal ourselves? Will we show up?

This fight is ours. We are men!

There is a famous story about an ad allegedly placed by the great Antarctic Explorer, Ernest Shackleton: “Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success.’- Legend has it 5,000 men signed up!

Let’s not go gentle into that good night. Let’s make that hazardous journey into the breach. The honour and recognition in Heaven will be great!

God Bless You all, my brothers. And God Bless America!!

Q+A: If asked, “What can we do?” We all have different gifts and talents.

- Chris Stefanick 30 day challenge
- Grandparents: Read bible stories, watch movies that model virtue. Give gifts that enhance virtue or teach Bible. Visible prayer, Keep Holy The Sabbath. mentoring
- Fraternus
- Father’s Guild
- Small Groups- On tap or otherwise.
- Letters to the editor -School board meetings
- Proctor Open Gyms: BBall, cards, Catholic books
- Evenings of recollections and weekly “accountability” circles.
- called and gifted workshops
- Renew

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