

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**January 3, 2016**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Loving The Church**

About once a year, I take the time to host what I call a “teaching Mass” in which instead of celebrating Mass, I go through and explain the different parts of the Mass. At the end of the night, I always host an open forum in which people can ask any question they wish. At my last teaching Mass, one of the people in attendance began to talk about his hopes that Pope Francis would change a lot of things. I challenged the man to love the Church we have and not the one that he hoped for. I went on to explain to him that staying in the Church hoping that the Church would change was like a husband who promised to love his wife only after she lost twenty pounds. Ever since then my heart has been wrestling with the idea of “loving the Church, I have,” and how could I do this better? To answer that question, I decided to reflect on the advice that I give engaged couples as I prepare them for marriage and I came up with 10 ways in which we can love the Church we are in.

### **1. Positive Sentiment Override**

At my first parish there was a person on the staff that actually drove me crazy. Her theology was so completely opposite of mine that I wondered how she could call herself Catholic. It infuriated me that the pastor would not fire her and whenever we were assigned to work together, we did nothing but bump heads. Knowing that Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, I started trying positive sentiment override. Fifteen minutes before I would meet with her, I stopped and I said a prayer, in which I thanked God for three good qualities in her, I discovered overtime, that I began to treat her better and we were able to work better together. I have discovered when I find my patience being tested by the Church in one way or the other that all I have to do is to think about the Church’s positive qualities and I fall in love with her all over again.

Here are three positive qualities about the Church to get you started.

1. The Catholic Church is the only Church that can trace its roots all the way back to the apostles and the only one that Christ promised would not be wrong in matters of faith and morals.
2. The Catholic Church is the largest charitable organization in the world helping people everywhere no matter what their race or nationality is.
3. The Catholic Church has the Sacraments especially the Eucharist.

### **2. Criticism Verses Complaining**

Many relationship counselors write that it is alright to complain about problems, but one should avoid criticizing their partner at all cost. Complaining to them is grumbling about how an event or action that affected you in a negative way and criticizing goes beyond that to attack the human nature of his or her spouse. I have discovered personally it is better for me to complain sometimes about the Church than to hold it in. While complaining though, I strive hard to avoid criticizing the Church (attacking her human and divine nature) realizing at the same time that Jesus often found himself frustrated with His apostles.

Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, a Vietnamese bishop who was held in prison and tortured for his faith wrote this in his book called: *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison*: “A person who really loves the Church does not seek to destroy it.” He went on to write: “During the last two thousand years, the Church has been betrayed by apostles, popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, religious, and lay people in extraordinary ways which Paul VI called “self-destruction.” However, after each of these upheavals, the Church has renewed itself and become ever more fresh and brilliant and strong. The Church continues to live the mystery of the passion and resurrection.”

Psychologists and counselors talk sometimes about the fundamental attribution error. This is where we human beings tend to attribute more ill will and intention to someone else than to ourselves. If a person cuts us off in traffic it is because he is a jerk. If we cut someone off it was accident or it was necessary. Most of the time, when we get hurt by others there is no premeditation involved. Most bad things happen out of neglect than malice/ill will.

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**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**January 10, 2016**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Loving The Church**

"There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate The Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be," — Fulton J. Sheen. It seems like the number of people who hate The Church keeps growing. I pray that Fulton Sheen is right and that they just have to understand what the Church is teaching fully. Here are some more ways in which we can grow more in love with the Catholic Church instead of hoping that she will change something soon. Remember this list comes from my reflection on how to love the Church and my advice I give to engage couples.

### **3. Avoid Defensiveness (Personal Weaknesses)**

One of the things that I have to repeat to myself often is the saying from St. Augustine "The Church is a hospital for sinners and not a hotel for saints." I believe that it is almost impossible being a priest in the post scandal Church today and not feel at least a little bit persecuted by the Church's hierarchy. For example, all it used to take for me to work a youth camp in another diocese was a letter from my bishop to their bishop. Starting this year, I had to watch a one hour video online and submit to background checks from the diocese that the camp was in because the letter from my bishop was no longer good enough. At first, I was offended, but I remembered the idea that defensiveness rarely ever accomplishes anything but more conflict because when I get defensive I often aggressively criticize the person I am defending myself from. This year, I decided to turn the other cheek and I prayerfully decided to offer up this extra inconvenience and hurt feelings for a sick friend.

I think of Mother Teresa's prayer:

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway in the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

### **4. Understand Defensiveness (Weakness in Others)**

One of the most important lessons I learned in counseling is that uncalled for aggressiveness can be a sign of weakness in the person who is being aggressive. For example, when two adults are chatting with one another, they should both feel that they are on equal grounds, but sometimes a person for one reason or another does not feel equal to the other person. In the conversation they might try to compensate by raising their voice and becoming more intimidating. The saying therefore "The loudest one in the room is the weakest" often rings true. When someone attacks me for something I said in a homily or a new policy in the parish in a way that that appears to be hateful, crude or obnoxious, I can see the truth that how they are behaving says more about them than it says about me. I am not only able to keep my calm, but also unite my sufferings with Christ who suffered so gracefully through the Passion.

Here are three more pieces of advice from Cardinal Thuan.

1. Do not be surprised when people seek to destroy the Church. They seek to kill Christ again, but since they cannot do so, they seek to destroy the Church which is the Body of Christ.
2. You say that you would never turn against the Church, but you do not hesitate to oppose the representatives of the Church. If this is how you think, you are playing games!
3. Before you criticize the Church as being removed from social reality, read the documents and encyclicals of the popes. You will be surprised to discover that they have dealt with every problem with deep insight. You will see just

how radical and advanced were their policies of renewal, drawn from the Scriptures, the grace of God, and tradition. As Pope Pius XII once said, if we put into practice even a little of the popes' teachings the Church and the world would be transformed.

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**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**January 17, 2016**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Loving The Church**

Perhaps one of the reasons why it is so hard to love the Church is because it is so familiar. The phrase "familiarity breeds contempt" comes to mind. When we first get something we see that something as special and unique but over time though it becomes just another part of our lives. Moving into a new house is exciting but the same house will eventually become mundane. Going to a new school can be scary but eventually you get the routine down. I almost wish people would have to change parishes once every five years so that could be shaken out of their complacency. Let us continue looking at our 10 ways to love the Church.

### **5. Stonewalling**

One of the worst things that can happen in a marriage is when an argument ends with what some counselors call stonewalling. Stonewalling refers to the moment when one person withdraws from an argument because they are too hurt to continue on. Sometimes people do this when it comes to Church teaching because it is easier to live in their error than to change their lifestyle in order to avoid sin. The best way to avoid stonewalling personally is to stay engaged in learning more about the Church's teachings that you do not understand. I have found it helpful to talk to teachers from the local university and the seminary about things that I struggle with. I often walk away amazed at the wisdom behind the Church's teaching that I could not see before.

"The more knowledgeable we become, the more we realize our limitations. Only ignorant people believe their knowledge is unlimited." – Cardinal Van Thuan.

The God we worship as Catholics is the Deus Absconditus (The God who is hidden or unknowable) and the Deus Revelatus (the God who reveals himself to us). As I come to know others the more I spend time with them the more I get to know God the more I practice and study my faith. Part of the joy of faith is knowing that God is more than I can ever imagine.

### **6. Being Honest With God**

Characters like Job, "curse the day that I was born..." (Job 3) and Jeremiah, "you duped me O Lord, and I allowed myself to be duped," (Jeremiah 20:7) have shown me the power of being honest with God. The more that I am honest with God about my frustrations with His Church, the more I walk away with a sense that God's wisdom is beyond me. In addition, I discover that a lot of my frustration with the Church often comes from wounds that I need God to heal. The more that I am honest with God, the more that I can ask him for healing.

"A spirituality of imperfection suggests that the first prayer is a scream, a cry for help. "O God, come to my assistance / O lord, make haste to help me," reads Psalm 70, sung for over a millennium and a half at the beginning of each monastic hour." From: *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*. By Ernest Kurtz & Katherine Ketcham.

It is nice to know that God will not leave me no matter how angry I get. God's love is unconditional. The more honest I am in my relationship with God the more we grow closer together.

### **7. Praying the Old Testament**

Following the story of David and his dealing with Saul or praying over the passages of Moses and Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promise land has become a fruitful part of my prayer when I am growing angry with the Church because I can see from the very beginning that God has never chosen perfect people to be his followers or to be the leaders of His people.

Reading the Old Testament we learn just how faithful God is and how much more awesome His plan is for us. We also learn though that life is not always easy for God's chosen people. This is not because God is punishing the people in the Old Testament but because there turning away from God is them turning away from the source of life, light, and power. I can't blame anyone else when I pull the chord out of the outlet because I have taken the vacuum cleaner to far from the outlet.

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**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**January 24, 2016**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Loving The Church**

I hope the last few weeks have been helpful in your spiritual growth and I hope that you like me have learned more about loving the Church that we have and not the one we want. As we continue to examine ways in which we can learn to love the Church that we have I would like to offer three more ideas.

#### **8. Repair Attempts**

A repair attempt is any time that two people in the midst of arguing remind themselves that they are on the same side. I find that taking time to remind myself that God loves me and I desire to love Him helps me to not only put up with the Church but to embrace her evermore. As St. Paul discovered, persecuting the Church is persecuting Christ (Acts 9) and Jesus came into the world not to condemn me, but so that I might have life eternal (John 3:16).

I often find that when I am hurt by one part of the Church that there is another part of the Church there to help me heal. When I am hurt by someone who is dealing with their own weaknesses and struggles, I find God has already dispatched others to heal these wounds. The important thing is to make sure this leads to legitimate healing and not just us surrounding ourselves with other like minded people.

This suggestion also reminds me of the need to stop every once in a while and make sure that everyone knows that we are on the same team. It is alright to argue about where to put the advent wreath only if in the end we all realize that our relationships with others are more important than where the advent wreath goes.

Just because someone else disagrees with me does not mean that they disrespect me.

#### **9. Service**

Sometimes overcoming my dislike for something in the Church is as simple as getting over myself and stretching myself by performing some type of service for example helping with the parish fish fry or helping out at a soup kitchen. The more I focus on loving and serving others the more my problems seem to shrink, disappear, and melt away.

Mother Teresa is someone who always reminds me of what is truly important: "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in."

A man walking through the forest saw a fox that had lost its legs, and he wondered how it lived. Then he saw a tiger come up with the game in its mouth. The tiger ate its fill and left the rest of the meat for the fox. The next day God fed the fox by the means of the same tiger. The man began to wonder at God's greatness and said to himself, "I too shall just rest in a corner with full trust in the Lord and he will provide me with all that I need." He did this for many days

but nothing happened, and he was almost at death's door when he heard a voice say, "O you who are in the path of error, open your eyes to the truth! Stop imitating the disable fox and follow the example of the tiger."

## **10. Positive People**

Finally the best thing I can do to love the Church that I am in is to be with others who love the Church for who she is. As married couples must remember that their spouse is a gift from God and that they had agreed to overlook their spouses faults because no one is perfect, so we must remind ourselves that the Church is an awesome gift from God and that the imperfections that we perceive in her were things that we agree to overlook because of the love that we promised to give her.

One of the major differences between Catholics and Protestants is that as Catholics we believe we are saved as a people and not as an individual.

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**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**January 31, 2016**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Loving The Church**

The following is part of an article entitled: "Pope Francis Reveals 10 tips for Happiness" By Carol Glatz of Catholic News Services.

### **Ten Tips For Happiness:**

1. "Live and let live." Everyone should be guided by this principle, he said, which has a similar expression in Rome with the saying, "Move forward and let others do the same."
2. "Be giving of yourself to others." People need to be open and generous toward others, he said, because "if you withdraw into yourself, you run the risk of becoming egocentric. And stagnant water becomes putrid."
3. "Proceed calmly" in life. The pope, who used to teach high school literature, used an image from an Argentine novel by Ricardo Güiraldes, in which the protagonist -- gaucho Don Segundo Sombra -- looks back on how he lived his life. "He says that in his youth he was a stream full of rocks that he carried with him; as an adult, a rushing river; and in old age, he was still moving, but slowly, like a pool" of water, the pope said. He said he likes this latter image of a pool of water -- to have "the ability to move with kindness and humility, a calmness in life."
4. "A healthy sense of leisure." The pleasures of art, literature and playing together with children have been lost, he said. "Consumerism has brought us anxiety" and stress, causing people to lose a "healthy culture of leisure." Their time is "swallowed up" so people can't share it with anyone. Even though many parents work long hours, they must set aside time to play with their children; work schedules make it "complicated, but you must do it," he said. Families must also turn off the TV when they sit down to eat because, even though television is useful for keeping up with the news, having it on during mealtime "doesn't let you communicate" with each other, the pope said.
5. Sundays should be holidays. Workers should have Sundays off because "Sunday is for family," he said.
6. Find innovative ways to create dignified jobs for young people. "We need to be creative with young people. If they have no opportunities they will get into drugs" and be more vulnerable to suicide, he said. "It's not enough to give them food," he said. "Dignity is given to you when you can bring food home" from one's own labor.
7. Respect and take care of nature. Environmental degradation "is one of the biggest challenges we have," he said. "I think a question that we're not asking ourselves is: 'Isn't humanity committing suicide with this indiscriminate and tyrannical use of nature?'"

8. Stop being negative. "Needing to talk badly about others indicates low self-esteem. That means, 'I feel so low that instead of picking myself up I have to cut others down,'" the pope said. "Letting go of negative things quickly is healthy."

9. Don't proselytize; respect others' beliefs. "We can inspire others through witness so that one grows together in communicating. But the worst thing of all is religious proselytism, which paralyzes: 'I am talking with you in order to persuade you,' No. Each person dialogues, starting with his and her own identity. The church grows by attraction, not proselytizing," the pope said.

10. Work for peace. "We are living in a time of many wars," he said, and "the call for peace must be shouted. Peace sometimes gives the impression of being quiet, but it is never quiet, peace is always proactive" and dynamic.

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