

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 18, 2019
Part One

“and Jeremiah sank into the mud.” (Jeremiah 38:6)

In light of the recent Pew Research Center survey results which found that roughly 7 out of 10 professed Catholics **DO NOT** believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, I believe it necessary that we must address this issue. In light of their findings, Gregory Smith wrote an article (pewresearch.org August 5, 2019) which revealed: *“In fact, nearly seven-in-ten Catholics (69%) say they personally believe that during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine used in Communion “are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.” Just one-third of U.S. Catholics (31%) say they believe that “during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus.” Some may say these results can be misleading because they surveyed “professed” Catholics and not “actual attending” Catholics. Pew Research did however actually address this issue and the results were nothing for Catholics to be proud of. “About six-in-ten (63%) of the most observant Catholics — those who attend Mass at least once a week — accept the church’s teaching about transubstantiation. Still, even among this most observant group of Catholics, roughly one-third (37%) don’t believe that the Communion bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ (including 23% who don’t know the church’s teaching and 14% who know the church’s teaching but don’t believe it).” Using our parish as the example, look around, count three people, and realize one of these three does not believe what we are professing here in this Mass is actually real.*

This new information only affirms the results of a 2018 Gallup Poll which compared church attendance from the 1950’s to the end of 2017. We proclaim the young the future of the Catholic Church, however of those surveyed: 73% of young people (21-29) attended Mass weekly in 1955 as compared to 25% of the same age group who attend now. We have experienced a decline of over 50% Mass attendance in just over 60 years. When factoring all age groups, Gallup stated: *“From 2014 to 2017, an average of 39% of Catholics reported attending church in the past seven days. This is down from an average of 45% from 2005 to 2008 and represents a steep decline from 75% in 1955.”* (Catholics’ Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide, by Lydia Saad, April 9, 2018)

As I reflected upon these very troubling poll findings, my prayer turned to today’s first reading from the book of Jeremiah, specifically this moment of Jeremiah’s being stuck in the mud. I imagine Jeremiah standing in the slime and filth of that dark well, holding a sleeve over his nose due to the stench. He looks up to the sky, the light of freedom, knowing how hopeless his situation was at that moment. His only chance of salvation would come from an unlikely source, Ebed-melech the Cushite. I wondered if Jeremiah asked himself the question the Catholic Church needs to ask herself now: *“How did I get myself into this?”* An easy answer for both Jeremiah and the Church - SLOWLY. As Jeremiah was slowly lowered down into the mud of that cistern, so too the Catholic Church has slowly gone down this well of unbelief and scattered attendance. And like Jeremiah, she too must struggle in the filth and the dark waiting for relief to come. Will salvation and freedom arrive to save the Church through an unlikely source as it did Jeremiah? My answer to that is a most definite YES. In the meantime, I will, beginning next week, offer a few points I have gleaned from my prayer, study, and reflection of things we can offer during this time to become that “unlikely” source of salvation for our Church. May God’s Holy Spirit guide my thoughts and your hearts as we, as a parish family, explore these issues together.