

“Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s; and to God, the things that are God’s.”

Mt 22:21

Many have been taken by surprise by the marked increase in the number of people across the West who have signed up to programmes of instruction in the Catholic Faith in the last couple of years. This is a matter of rejoicing, and all who turn to Christ are to be welcomed with open arms.

However, what is less well known is the proportion of those who drop away from the preparation programmes after a few weeks or months. I do not say this to discourage but because it seems to highlight a particular issue with so many in today’s modern world.

Many people feel called to seek something higher. Others conclude that what they see in the world around them cannot be all that there is. In both cases, there is a hunger for spiritual nourishment and an encounter with God, even if it is not always put in those terms at the time. And so, such people go in search of the living God, many of them turning to the Catholic Church which offers something of substance, something eternal, something of value above and beyond the mundane experiences of their daily existence. And most of those who come along to such programmes, do indeed stay with the Church and with the Christ who has called them. But why do so many turn away again?

Well, there will be many reasons, and we cannot know them all. But many are taken by surprise to discover that the God whom they have sought out and begun to follow suddenly starts making demands of them. In a society which teaches that whatever is right for you is ‘your truth,’ and that whatever lifestyle seems good to you is indeed the lifestyle you should embrace, it can come as a shock to discover that the Catholic Church still teaches that there are such things as moral absolutes – some things which are morally right and some

which are morally wrong – and that there are obligations which we must fulfil if we are to live as Catholics. In other words, the Catholic Church demands things of Her members. And the Church demands things of us because the God who founded Her demands things of us.

Our Faith is not about finding a comfortable path through life accompanied by a God who will clear away all the brambles, who will remove all distress and pain, and who will tell us that our choices are always the right ones or, at the worst, mere mistakes. Our Faith is not about finding a God who simply affirms our existing beliefs and behaviours: it is not for us to make God in our own image and likeness but to allow Him to mould us to *His* image and likeness.

In other words, our Faith teaches us of the need to repent of our sins, to say sorry and do penance for them, and to change our lives by turning away from sin and turning, instead, to a life of virtue. Our Faith teaches us that we need to humble ourselves as Christ humbled Himself; to fast, as Christ fasted; to be generous in the service of our neighbour, as Christ was generous in the service of His neighbour; to spend time in prayer, as Christ spent time in prayer; to worship God on the sabbath, as Christ went to the synagogue on the sabbath; to suffer, as Christ suffered; and to offer our sufferings and our death to God, as Christ offered His sufferings and His death to God.

In short, our Faith demands of us that we should conform ourselves to the likeness of Christ – which is, after all, the definition of holiness – so that in giving ourselves to Christ in this life, as Christ gave Himself to the Father, we might join Him in everlasting blessedness in the next life, just as Christ ascended back into heaven at the end of His time here on earth.

In other words, we have obligations to fulfil: we must keep the Ten Commandments, including going to Mass every Sunday; we must change our lives and stop using bad or blasphemous language; we must work hard to eliminate habits of sin such as

impatience or a quick temper; we must be active in seeking out neighbours who are in need and be generous in our service of them; we must be chaste and spotless in our private lives, and must shun the impurity of the modern world which says that all sexual choices and behaviours are good in themselves and of equal value; we must fight to preserve the value of human life in the face of unjust and dæmonic laws; and above all, we must worship and do homage to the Lord our God who made us, who has redeemed us, who forgives us our sins, who sanctifies us, and who raises us up to everlasting life.

But having made known to us the teachings and demands of our God, the Catholic Church – in the Mass and the Sacraments, in Her devotions, and prayers, and the wisdom of the saints – makes available to us everything we need to fulfil our obligations to God and to grow in the likeness to Christ.

Indeed, She makes it possible for us, in the words of Christ Himself, to render unto God the things that are God's.