

The Church should make life harder for Catholics

Decades of relaxed rules have left the faithful unfit to fight secularism, says Michael Jennings

edge so as to be in a position to make "informed choices" that will help. To hold fast to the teachings of the Church in this area it is strength of will which is needed. Restraint, patience and, often, bravery are the weapons to use.

If Catholics can't go without food for a few hours, or go to church during the week once in a while, or get on their knees to receive Communion, then we are edging towards becoming indistinguishable from those who only have this world and each other to rely on. Christians life is not supposed to be a stroll in the park but the carrying of a cross, the climbing of a mountain. To the outsider, a Catholic's iron commitment to the Mass, the strength to defer pleasure, the ability to suffer cheerfully and the courage to defend Church teaching are things which impress and are important factors in bringing about conversions. The kind of dedication exhibited by the Olympic athletes certainly draws many others into that orbit and, as St Paul says: "Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one." In any case, the things being suggested here hardly amount to having to train day after day while the limbs scream for mercy. I am not even suggesting the total prohibition of all cakes and ale. Still, as St Paul didn't say (although he obviously knew it all too well), great journeys start with a single step.

Michael Jennings is a former cartographer and teacher, now retired. He is married with two grown-up children. He became a Catholic in 1980 after dithering for 20 years.

A blame-shifting by cover-ups and accusations of

the Catholic Church in its handling of allegations of child sexual abuse by priests have been front-page news in Australia. Newspaper headlines such as "Senior Catholic Priests in Child Sex Cover-Up Inquiry" point to claims that the Church has attempted to hide possible sex abuse within its walls rather than reporting it to the police.

Whether these cases will stand up is yet to be proved, but investigators in the states of New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria are currently searching for evidence that in many instances priests were merely moved on. This is not unique to Australia. There have been far-reaching repercussions from court cases involving cover-ups in Ireland, Germany and America.

Two dedicated investigators by the NSW police, Strike Force Lantle and Strike Force Glenroe, are currently looking into alleged cover-ups involving three senior churchmen, including a bishop and an archbishop. An MP has renewed calls for a royal commission. Last April in Victoria, following revelations of 40 suicides of abuse victims by two priests, each Sunday. But with 5.5 million Catholics – that is, 25.3 per cent of the population – the Catholic Church, despite the growth of Pentecostal churches, is Australia's largest religion.

All members of the hierarchy vehemently deny the allegations. But even if they vehemently deny the Church to protect children from sexual abuse, many priests already jailed re-focusing attention on the subsequent court hearings. Along with diminishing churchgoers, the drop in the number of Australian-born priests continues. In the 2012 directory of Catholic priests in Australia once again the most common name is Vietnamese. There are 40 priests there are no official

A new scandal is shaking the Aussie Church

Jill, Duchess of Hamilton
Notebook



While in Australia I made inquiries into how all this will adversely affect congregations. The answer is that Mass attendance is now similar to that in Dublin, with less than one in five Catholics kneeling in pews each Sunday. But with 5.5 million Catholics – that is, 25.3 per cent of the population – the Catholic Church, despite the growth of Pentecostal churches, is Australia's largest religion.

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The Church in England is losing the fight against secularism. With the opponents of the Church gaining the upper hand we have to ask if Catholics are well-trained and strong enough to fight back. We are outnumbered and, at best, considered superstitious and irrelevant – at worst, a danger to society. In such circumstances there needs to be a stiffening of commitment if more and more of us are not to fall victim to the beguiling temptations of the secular world, where comfort and having a good time are other life to look forward to. Perhaps we should employ St Paul as our personal trainer and model ourselves on him. He says he is intent on winning: "That is how I fight, not beating the air. I treat my body hard and make it obey me." His message: toughen up, take up your cross daily and rejoice in sharing Christ's sufferings.

Now, while Catholics in other parts of the world are suffering and dying for their faith, we in this country are permitted to abandon things that were easy for things easier still. The Eucharistic fast, for example, once began at midnight, then it was reduced to three hours. Now, in a Mass which goes much beyond the usual time, it would be possible to be munching sandwiches during the penitential act and still not break the fast. Fasting itself seems to be regarded as a gruesome medieval practice best replaced by good works, whereas it is a preparation for doing good works better.

More mollycoddling is in evidence with the recent transferring of various feast days to Sunday. This has saved Catholics a needed updating every 10 years and which standing easier but did it at the expense of a unifying language, a language that didn't exist by Vatican II. At one level it made under-Mass, even though this was not envisaged the wholesale use of the vernacular in the message. Yet another case-making occurrence is weakened and therefore the associated virtues, such as perseverance, bravery, restraint, patience and chastity. These virtues are vital armaments in the battle against secularism. Nowhere is strength of will more needed than in the field of sexual morality. It is not more known that by removing difficulties the will is the better response.

The point being made in all of this is that we are sinful without being devastated by the news. No doubt there would be those who would storm off in a huff by the news. No doubt there would be muttering: "This language is intolerable, as they did when Christ said that eating his flesh and drinking his blood was the only way to obtain eternal life. He did not seek to assuage the hurt feelings of those heading for the exit by going soft on the message."

Another change which occurred after Vatican II was the practice of kneeling. This made things easier at the expense of profound symbolism – kneeling being a sign denoting weakness, submission and obedience. To quote St Paul again: "It is when I am weak then I am strong." True, we stand as a sign of respect but standing on your own two feet and standing up for oneself are phrases to do with self-sufficiency. Surely when coming face to face with God, as one does at Communion, kneeling is the better response.

Further, English is our weekday language. It's the one we use for sweating, arguing and lying. It might be a good idea to have Latin as our Sunday best. Then, when we came home after Mass, we might find those work-a-day words washed and ironed, all ready for the next week.

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