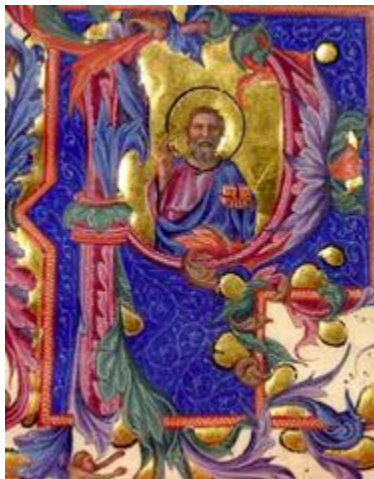




# Boston Catholic Journal

www.boston-catholic-journal.com  
editor@boston-catholic-journal.com

## What is my Primary Obligation as a Catholic?



Saint Paul

"How shall they believe Him, of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher? (St. Paul. Letter to the Romans 10.14)

**To preach the Gospel ... when *no one else* will**

### Where are the Preachers?

**I**f they are not in the homes, in the playgrounds, in the work places of Catholics — *at any opportunity at all that presents itself* — then they have ceased to be. They are no longer among us. "But we hear the Priest every Sunday give a homily!", you retort. Indeed, I reply. You hear much about "what *I* think Jesus means" ... and not what the Church teaches us that Jesus means. I

am not interested in hearing what a given priest "believes Jesus is saying" — but I am deeply interested in hearing what *Jesus actually says Himself*, what the *Holy Catholic Church teaches us that He means ...* which is to say, what *Christ* means! It is to preach the Gospel ... when no one else will.

This is often quite different from what "Father Bill" believes Christ is *really* saying — apart from Christ's own words that appear oddly clear to us without an involuted explanation involving things too often only remotely or imaginatively tangent to the actual Gospel Reading. It's show time. Time for the priest to display his talent for finding humor in the most solemn utterances of Christ — and bring laughter, rather than the occasion of grace, to the congregation. "Oh", we ooze, "that Father Bill is *such* a rascal! Look at the gleam in his eye!"

## **The Third Rail called Sin**

This, of course, presumes that he attempts at all to invoke the meaning (real or imagined) of the Gospel passage just read. So often, too often, most often, it is overlooked entirely in favor of a rise from the *audience ...* I mean, *congregation*. "Let's see how clever I can be, how entertaining, how funny, and they will love me! I will then prove myself to be a good priest, for I brought them something far greater than the Sacraments, even greater than Jesus Christ Himself in the Holy Eucharist — I brought them laughter ... and even "spiced it up a bit" to show them that I'm no different from them. Sure, I'll throw in the obligatory, "love each other", "you are the light of the world", and very clearly "God's chosen ones" — but I'll stay clear of the third rail called sin. *What if I prick someone's conscience?!* The basket would be empty in a month! — and who will be left for me to tickle pink? Where would I get my positive "feed-back" fix for the week?" This is serious stuff.

## **The *alter Christus* — altered and tailored to fit**

We used to know, "Father Flannery" and "Bishop Sheen". Remember? Probably not. Why? Because the priest no longer sees *himself*, nor (consequently) do *we* see him, as an "*alter Christus*", literally, "*another Christ*" in the world, which his ordination to the Priesthood made him. We have opted, instead for the leveling of Christ in the person of His priest to the lowest democratic and common denominator: a mere man. They are just, "one the guys" (sorry, girls) and so we now have "Father Dick" and, here in Boston, even "Cardinal Sean". We are *all* on an *intimate first-name basis* with our priests, bishops, and cardinals. Try that with your own Senator or even your local Representative or Mayor. Why is this? "*It's just so ... cool!*" Our cardinals, bishops, priests — in order to "really reach us, to understand us on a human level" — have *de-Christified* themselves, thrown off that out-dated vestige and aura of an *alter Christus* — "another

Christ" — so that they can be "just another guy". And somehow that desacralization will make us more likely to be holy when we are in contact with them ... Right.

## "Them goddam Yankees"

In repudiating being "Christ-like" they no longer call us in our own vocations to be Christ-like either. We are called to be just "one of the guys" ("C'mon, Fadda ... it's Miller Time! Let's crack open a frosty and root for the Red Sox. Them goddam Yankees ain't no good no how — jus' like you said in your last homily ... and the one before that." Sanctity is the Series and the Parousia is the Sox in the finals, and Heaven? ... the Boston Patriots in the Superbowl. "Fadda Bill" is definitely one of the guys. And none of the "guys" is anything like Christ. It's circular *ad infinitum*. Saint Peter who was crucified upside down in Rome or Saint Paul beheaded in the same place? Home-schooling kids stuff. Okay, that was a cheap shot. The kids are head and shoulders over "the guys" — you know, Fadda Bill, Cardinal Sean, ... and the "other Christs" who left His company to become "just one of the *other guys*" so "that in a way beyond comprehension the other guys can get to Heaven, too. Maybe even before the 6th inning. "Pass me another frosty, would you Fadda?"

## So, What has this to do with Preaching and being Catholic?

Well, this really brings us back to Saint Paul: "How shall they believe Him, of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher? (Romans 10.14)

"Fadda Bill" and "Cardinal Sean" have more pressing matters than saving souls. In fact, the entire lexicon associated with the "salvation of souls" is a fourth-tier priority behind Social Justice, Saving the Planet, and Immigration. I mean, get real! Mother Earth is in far more pressing need of salvation! Look at the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico! Where have you been? And all those poor water fowl! *Illegal* Immigrants have unaddressed and underfunded *legal* rights! The Social Network for all that ails society cannot be ignored! And your talking about "souls"? I mean, get real! 4.7 million ducks are in the Mississippi River coastal marshes and face destruction! And you're talking about the peril of the destruction and damnation of millions of human souls for all eternity who haven't even died yet? Where are your priorities?! Yeah, okay, there are dozens of government agencies to deal with these issues ... and not one outside the Church to deal with the salvation of immortal souls. But after all! Can't you see? That's the trouble with you Catholics. You keep your eyes on God and not on the things that really matter to the world: ducks, wildlife, deforestation, endangered animals, global warming, politics, immigration, Wall Street! Well, not *all* of you, I grant. Your bishops have *lots* of conferences on these issues. At least *they* get it!"

Indeed. Where *are* our priorities as Catholics?

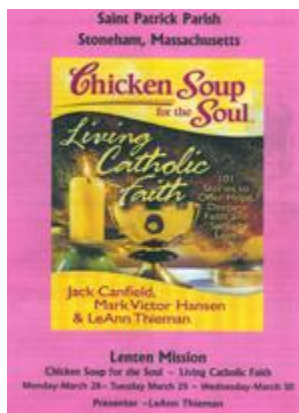
## With Christ

That is where they *should* be. At least in the eyes of Christ, the Gospel, and the Church. We have hundreds of organizations preaching social justice, immigration reform, global warming — ***but no one is preaching the Gospel!*** Even those to whom it has been entrusted have tossed it off as an archaic embarrassment. ***So who ... WHO will preach the Gospel?*** Most often not your priest. And your bishop is busy with other matters and photo ops<sup>3</sup>.

## Out-Sourcing Lent

As of this writing it is the holy season of Lent 2011. What rich soil in which to harvest souls! So much that is deep and holy; so many parables of our Blessed Lord to which even the most homiletically-challenged priests can advert in calling us to the serious business of holiness, of self-denial instead of "self-affirmation", of conversion from sin. It is the venue preeminent for preachers! As Christ told us with the greatest urgency, "The fields are white to harvest!"<sup>4</sup> How, then, do our parishes, our priests, our "parish councils" respond to this plea from Christ Himself? Let us take one fairly common example, in this case St. Patrick "Faith Community" in Stoneham, Massachusetts. The theme? The "Lenten Mission"?

## "Chicken Soup for the Soul"



[click to enlarge](#)

St. Patrick parish has apparently hired a "motivational" speaker (to the tune of a \$5000 - \$12,000 speaker fee, according to the motivational speakers' Premier Speakers Bureau --- which comes from your collection basket). Apparently the pastor does not feel himself equal to so grave a

challenge as to call souls to Christ himself, so he ... well, "outsourced it." And with delight, according to the bulletin:

"We are singularly blessed to welcome LeAnn Thiemann to Saint Patrick Parish as *the first lay person* and *the first woman* to present our three-night [at \$5,000-\$12,000 *per night*, we wonder?] Lenten Mission."

"*First lay person* and *the first woman*" — how ... *avant garde*, how "progressive", of St. Patrick's! Surely they are on the very cusp of things to come! Such a distinction for a mere drop in the bucket! Only \$5,000-\$12,000. Money well and wisely spent, to be sure. Prevailing wisdom in contemporary Catholicism appears every bit as edified as it's counterpart in classical antiquity where, 2,400 years ago, Socrates famously took issue with the Sophists of his day who "sold" *wisdom* for a fee, for a living, but this is Stoneham, not Athens, and what is being sold is not wisdom but *contemporary* Catholic teaching through outsourcing the Lenten Mission to "professional speakers", for a staggering fee. So what will the parishioners of St. Patrick's get for their money (it *is* *their* money, after all, spent by others who apparently can produce nothing compelling on their own)?

"**She will provide practical advice**", the bulletin continues, "**on the ways in which we can get ourselves in better shape: physically, emotionally, and [oh, yes ...] spiritually.**"

Welcome to Lent at St. Patrick's in Stoneham, a small and sad iteration of the spiritual bankruptcy and malaise that afflicts the Church in America at large. ... now, back to the business of the real meaning of Lent, and the call to conversion and sanctification --- in a word to the business of the *salvation* of souls, apart from the putative values of Chicken Soup. **Who** will call others — lapsed Catholics, non-Catholics, unbelievers, to Christ? — excluding, of course, "professional speakers" who will do so ... for a fee ("Freely you have received", our Blessed Lord said, "Freely give". Remember? Matthew 10.8)

## Who is left?

**You!** "Preach the word: be instant *in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke* in all patience *and doctrine*", Saint Paul says <sup>1</sup>. "But I'll be shunned! My friends will flee me! My boss will fire me! I may even end up in jail if I do it in public or on government property!"

Most likely.

But that — **THAT IS THE COST OF BEING CATHOLIC!** It is the cost of faithfulness to Jesus Christ, His Church, and the Gospel:

***"Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."***<sup>2</sup>

These are the very last words, ***the final commandment***, given by Christ before His Ascension into Heaven. They are the last words of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

If ***you*** do not preach the Gospel, in season and out of season, and at great cost — no one will.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 St. Timothy 42

<sup>2</sup> St. Matthew 28.19-20

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cardinalseansblog.org/>

*"Mirror, mirror on the wall ..."* Number of *photographs* of "Cardinal Sean" *himself* on his *own* June 2010 "blog": 37 to date (12 June 2010) ... and 18 more days of photo-ops to go!

May? A modest 47. There was, of course, a time when *Christ* used to be "the point" and the "center of attention".

But that alluring mirror that "Cardinal Sean" seems ever to hold before himself — and us — appears to suggest to him that he is *much* more "photogenic" than Jesus, especially on the Cross. But that is what "blogs" are about, right? Promoting oneself ... not another. And certainly not "Jesus Christ crucified" whom Saint Paul incessantly preached (1 Corinthians 1.23).

<sup>4</sup> St. John 4.35

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## **Responses to the Editor:**

"This is a very, very good article that makes its point very clear... yes it has to be said ... Thank you! It proclaims a truth, that we have an obligation to give Christ to others and not just the hierarchy, priests and religious.

Give a definition of PREACHING, many people regard it, interpret it as a negative... i.e moralizing , it is not it is the proclamation of the the truth of the Gospel, it is giving Christ to others!

It is so profoundly true, that the Holy Spirit is the great revealer, He can make the most dense of passages clear to us, often 'personal explanations' only confuse. Take for example when you expose yourself to Sacred Scripture for the first time: God speaks, communicates as He will and clearly even if the individual words seem difficult. What you have written here is so true!

Excellent point:

*" ... apart from Christ's own words that appear oddly clear to us without an involuted explanation involving things too often only remotely or imaginatively tangent to the actual Gospel Reading".*

I would add too that St Paul and Christ's followers preached a CHRIST CRUCIFIED, they did not avoid the problem of pain and suffering but gave us words and concepts that drew us beyond it to the Resurrection, omitting to talk about dying, death and suffering is also a great failure on the part of many preachers.

The THIRD RAIL — is so important in a world loosing the sense of sin, this needs to be said, all the great preachers in the church, Francis, Dominic, Anthony, and so many others tried to touch the heart of man to return to God... and what's more it is WHAT PEOPLE FOR THE MOST PART want to hear, I have at times given some souls hard love and it is much more fruitful than pussy footing around the issues... truth must be spoken, but always in love.

The other Christ's-- also an excellent point, excellent.... we have bought into the world far far too much. But there ARE exemplary preachers in the priesthood: look at Fr Baron, Fr Cantala, Fr Corapi, Fr Groeschel ... and many others. Why do people really listen to them? Because at the end of the day the soul yearns for TRUTH.

Think of Padre Pio, thousands went to him and why? Hard love, the truth, hard confessions! and Gospel directness! That's why! We buy into second best by supporting the joke scenario, which makes me want to weep anyway.

I laughed my head off about the ducks, this is so so true! Well done! A good thrust, I think this is one of the devil's greatest smoke screens of our time, to occupy the mind of man with this issue. Of course we need to respect the earth and not abuse it, that is simply common sense. But the constant issue about global warming eventually gets on my nerves.

Is man going to harness the sun? The winds? Is he going to by his own human strength change the planet! COME ON ... there is a great blindness here; look, our planet in many ways is dying but it's all part of the life cycle.... it's happened before, if you study the life of the planet we haven't got it in our power to change this cycle, we might think we have ... but we have not.

It would do man far more good to see this, accept it and seek for God... the planet has been through ice ages, and fire all before, all before, it's a natural cycle. OK, we may have assisted it but do we really think we can make much difference to GOD'S PLANET! Come on!!! It's a great diversion all this ... from what *really* matters for man.

Your paragraph on this was sooo good! Ducks! Now it's snakes! They say there is a great dying off on the planet of snakes (apart from politicians)!

I loved your ending WITH CHRIST ... it was a good ending.

I really did enjoy the article.

Well done! Keep going!

**B.O.C.**  
**NYC**

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Dear Sir:

While I agree with your assessment that our priests and bishops should not be referred to on a first name basis (though I think this applies to everyone, the informality of 21st century culture is ridiculous) there is something that needs to be noted in regard to 'Cardinal Sean' (I infer that you are referring to Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley). The reason that Cardinal Sean goes by 'Cardinal Sean' is due to the fact that he is a member of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. He was born Patrick O'Malley and took the name Sean (in honour of St John the Apostle) when he professed his vows as a member of the order. Thus, his proper name is in fact 'Cardinal Sean', due to his membership in a mendicant order, which precedes his status as Cardinal Archbishop. We do not refer to Mother Teresa as 'Mother Bojhaxhiu' or the Blessed Father as 'Pope Ratzinger'. Certain persons do actually adopt a Christian name as a mononym depending on the traditions of their order (Cardinal Sean and Mother Teresa) or position (Pope Benedict XVI). The point I am trying to make here is that this is one of the few cases in which it would be acceptable to call a Cardinal by his [assumed] first name, just as you normal member of OFM Cap would be called 'Brother Paul' or 'Father James' as opposed to 'Father Taylor' or 'Bishop Anderson' which would apply in the case of a diocesan priest or bishop.

Other than that, spot on article. Very good.

Pax tecum,  
Aaron M.

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***EDITOR'S REPLY:***

Point taken, and many thanks for the correction. We do, however, note that a Catholic addressing a Cardinal should, in fact, address him as "Your Excellency", a protocol widely recognized in forms of address. It is also noteworthy that the press, as well as Vatican documents, invariably address Boston's present Cardinal as, "Cardinal O'Malley", thus avoiding the embarrassing



cutesiness of presumed personal familiarity that the name, "Cardinal Sean", invokes. To wit:

- **"Cardinal O'Malley defends school decision"**  
by Margaret Cabaniss 5/20/10  
[http://insidecatholic.com/Joomla/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=8163&Itemid=80](http://insidecatholic.com/Joomla/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=8163&Itemid=80)
- **Fate of Catholics United petition to Cardinal O'Malley uncertain**  
<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/fate-of-catholics-united-petition-to-cardinal-omalley-uncertain/>
- May 31, 2010 6:37 pm US/Eastern  
**Pope Requests Cardinal O'Malley's Help In Ireland**  
<http://wbztv.com/local/cardinal.sean.omalley.2.1724383.html>

If non-Catholics, and "professional" Catholics (not "professional Catholics") invariably accord the Cardinal this dignity, so, *a fortiori*, should Catholic laymen and ecclesiastics.

We are reminded of a story several years ago of a meeting after Mass between the priest and some members of the congregation upon leaving. One new parishioner, "Mrs. Jane Doe" was introduced to the priest and greeted him as "Father Murphy". "Please", the priest insisted, "you can call me Father Dick". Unabashed, the woman responded, "and you can call me Mrs. Doe."

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Dear Mr. del Campos,

Loved it! Why do priests think it is cool to be "kind-of-priests but not *really* priests", but as you said, "just one of the guys". Aren't they supposed to be examples of holiness, and not Joe Cool with a collar pretending to be American Idol? Its like, "Wow! I'm cool! I can relate!" In the parishes I've been to the priest seems like he can't wait to leave the altar and get out into the audience and play. OR he invites all the kids to come up while he sits down with them and plays Mister Rogers. When are they going to get it that we go to Mass not see him "be cool" while he makes a moron of himself, but to be with God who is somewhere backstage waiting for his turn! Who are the real morons who teach them this junk? That's what we'd like to know!

Cindy and Mark K.  
MA

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***EDITOR'S REPLY:***

We suggest you contact:

Rev. Arthur Kennedy - Rector and President  
Saint John's Seminary  
127 Lake Street  
Brighton, MA 02135  
(617) 254 - 2610  
[info@sjs.edu](mailto:info@sjs.edu)

Perhaps Rev. Kennedy can shed some light on the pedagogical method that appears to reduce authentic vocations to comical skits. We would be interested in what you find. Let us know, would you?



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