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- Five Kinds ...  
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# FIVE kinds of CATHOLICS

A CURSORY ANALYSIS





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# FIVE KINDS OF CATHOLICS



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WHY YOU SHOULD BE A CATHOLIC

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✠ JOHN GREGORY MURRAY  
*Archbishop of St. Paul*

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Declassified

OLD FATHER BARNES had not seen Robert and Herb since their return to college a year ago, so he was quite overjoyed when, upon answering the doorbell, he found the two of them standing there, both dressed like true galahads of the campus and sporting smiles that threatened to cut their faces right in half.

"Come in, boys . . . come in! Glad to see you!" Father Barnes greeted them happily.

The cordiality that existed between the old priest and the two college students was typical of the close, filial relationship that develops between a priest and his converts. To Robert and Herb, Father Barnes was "Father" in the most intimate sense of the word; for, besides his unceasing affection and ever willing confidences, it was he who had, through the waters of Baptism, given them a wonderful new life, an exciting new life full of meaning and bright with hope. And to Father Barnes these two young stalwarts were more than good friends: they were living symbols of the success of his holy priesthood. He was especially proud of them since they had not let an impasse develop in their new found faith but were steadily progressing in it. This last he knew because he had asked for and received a report from the college Chaplain.

The three seated themselves in the rectory's humble but comfortable parlor and immediately commenced to exchange pleasant little bits of news. They talked of parish activities, college curricula and touched on a variety of other mutually interesting topics, laugh-

ing and joking as they went and generally making the most of the reunion. Before long, however, the conversation switched to a more serious vein. It was then that Robert got them started on a topic which turned out to be the main theme of their meeting.

"Father Barnes," Robert queried, "I am aware that the Catholic faithful are *one* body, called the Mystical Body of Christ, and that this unity under a single authority is one of the four marks of the true Church of Christ—but within this unity of membership aren't there different kinds of Catholics, like good, bad and indifferent? Or is it theologically wrong to say that a person can be a bonafide member of the Mystical Body of Christ and be bad at the same time? This question was the subject for a very lively debate on the campus the other day so Herb here and I hit on the idea of putting the question to you."

"Yes, how about that, Father?" asked Herb, leaning forward anxiously.

Father Barnes reached leisurely into a drawer of the smoking table beside his chair, drew out a tobacco pouch and pipe, tapped some aromatic mixture into the bowl and carefully lit it. He took a couple of long draws which created a little cloud of white above him before breaking the suspenseful silence.

"No," Father Barnes replied, "it is *not* theologically wrong to say that the Church is composed of derelict as well as good and faithful members. In fact, there is every reason to believe that a very large percentage of Catholics are, to some extent, deficient in their faith. But, bear in mind, it is a condition that exists, not because of the teachings of the Church, but *despite* the teachings of the Church. The Church, by the authority



vested in her by Christ, can and does guarantee to all her members the means to holiness, but she cannot, due to man's free will, guarantee what her members will do with the means thus provided."

"I see," said Robert. "If every Catholic in the world abided faithfully by the teachings of the Church . . . why, we'd all be saints."

"Precisely," said Father Barnes.

"Boy! Wouldn't that be wonderful," mused Herb. "Just think, the gossips would be silenced and all the world could see plainly with their eyes what we already know in our hearts."

Father Barnes laughed. "A beautiful thought, Herb," he said, "but not a very realistic or practical one, I'm afraid. Let's not lose sight of why our Blessed Lord established His Church: to save that which is lost (Matt. 18:11), to call not the just, but sinners (Matt. 9:13). No, Herb, it is by admitting sinners into her fold that Holy Mother Church is able to teach them God's Will and through the sacraments provide them with the necessary grace to do God's Will. For, as Christ so aptly put it, it is the sick who need the physician, not the healthy. Remove the sinners from the rolls of the Church and you take away the very purpose of her existence."

Robert relaxed in his chair, looked meditative for a moment, then said, "You know, Father, you have given me a whole new appreciation of the Church. How can anything be so obvious and yet, to so many people, be so obscure?"

"I feel the same way," said Herb. "You sure got that question settled for us."

"That, boys, is my business," said Father Barnes.

He took a long draw from his pipe and emitted another cloud of fragrant white smoke.

The subject was too fascinating to Robert for him to let the discussion end there. Besides, it was not often these days that he and Herb got an audience with Father Barnes, their favorite confidant and counselor, and he intended to make the most of this one. "You have explained, Father, *why* all manner of people are found in the Catholic Church," Robert said. "Now would you — could you — give us some sort of index of the various kinds of Catholics. For example, we hear priests speak of 'nominal' Catholics every now and then to describe those who don't take their faith as seriously as they should. How many other kinds would you say there are?"

But no sooner had Robert gotten the words out of his mouth when he became fearful lest Father Barnes would regard the request as incongruous, unworthy of a college senior and one of his own well instructed converts. A glance at Herb, however, reassured him, for his companion, too, was plainly eager to have the answer.

Father Barnes smiled benignly. He enjoyed these little theological tete-a-tetes with Robert and Herb; first because he felt a keen obligation to satisfy all of their inquisitiveness concerning their new found faith; and second because their spirited company always added a little zest to the day's routine. Moreover, the clock on the mantel told him he still had a full hour before confessions in the Church.

"Now that is a good question, Robert," said Father Barnes, much to Robert's relief. "But what do you say we wet our whistles a little before tackling that

one." Mary, the housekeeper, had entered bringing tumblers filled with ginger ale. "There now," said Father Barnes, smacking his lips appreciatively after downing half the refreshment in his glass, "—to proceed with the assignment.

"First off, boys," he began, "you should know that the approach to this problem that I am going to use will *not* follow any established norm. That is because there is no established norm. Holy Mother Church, in her great wisdom, has refrained from cataloging her members but, instead, urges all to aspire to the greatest possible heights of spiritual perfection. The only exception is when she has conclusive evidence that a person who has died has been admitted into heaven, and then she honors them with the title, 'Saint,' or when she strongly suspects that a deceased person who was known for his great piety is in heaven, she confers the title 'Blessed' on him.

"In the course of the individual priest's pastoral work, however, he finds it expedient to classify the different degrees of Catholic faithfulness — the better to be able to cope with the spiritual problems of those under his care. That is what I have done and, at the risk of divulging, as it were, a trade secret (smile), I shall list the classifications for you. I think it will do you good to know them — it would be good if all Catholics knew them — not only as an aid in understanding your fellow Catholics, but more particularly as an aid in analyzing the spiritual rating of your own selves as the years go by."

The two youths sat transfixed with interest, their minds carefully digesting everything Father Barnes said.

“There are very probably hundreds of degrees of faithfulness,” Father Barnes went on, “but for all practical purposes I think they can all be pigeonholed into five main classifications: the fallen away, the absentee, the nominal, the loyal and finally the consecrated Catholic. In my definition of these classifications I shall begin with the fallen away, the prodigal sons of the Church, and then proceed step by step until we arrive at the consecrated state—symbolizing way stations on the road up the great mountain of Faith.

### **The Fallen Away**

“Do you recall Our Lord’s words when He lamented the ‘lost sheep’ of His fold?” Father Barnes asked. The youths nodded. “Well, He was making reference to those members of His Church who, like stray sheep, would succumb to illusions of greener pastures, ignore the dangers that lurk in the wilderness of the world, strike out on their own and before long find themselves lost. In the idiomatic terminology of the Church these strays are called fallen aways, meaning fallen from grace. Having separated themselves from communion with Christ in His Church, thereby depriving themselves of access to God’s sanctifying graces, they have permitted the world with all its superficialities to take over complete command of their reason—even as a carnival captivates the mind of a small child and transports it out of the world of reality into the land of fantasia and make-believe. What happens to the fallen away in the eternity that lies beyond the grave is no longer of prime concern to him. It is the exciting *now* that counts—the future be hanged.”

"We know a couple of guys in that category, don't we, Robert," said Herb. "They seem to be in a kind of spiritual vacuum."

Father Barnes relit his pipe, then continued. "The extent of the fallen away's spiritual bankruptcy is best illustrated by the hollow, pathetic excuses he has to offer: 'My wife (or husband) whom I love very dearly is prejudiced against the Church, so I take my leave of the Church in order to keep the peace.' Keep the peace, indeed. Since when is it possible for a person to find true peace after abandoning Christ, the Fountainhead of all peace?"

"Seems to me," interjected Robert, "that if such a person had any qualms of conscience about leaving the Church he or she wouldn't have married an anti-Catholic in the first place."

"Right you are, Robert," agreed Father Barnes. "Then there is the old 'One church is as good as another' alibi used by those who for various reasons of social or business expediency affiliate themselves with one of the non-Catholic religions. Or perhaps it is one of the forbidden secret societies to which he switches his loyalty. These fallen aways don't fool anyone either, least of all themselves. One cannot in his right senses witness the brilliance and glory of the sun one day, then assert that the world is illuminated by a row of street lamps the next."

"Isn't it strange," said Herb, "that some people cannot understand that God, He who is Truth one and indivisible, would never approve of divisions and contradictory doctrines in His household. Christ was certainly very explicit on that point."

"I'm afraid that you are being unduly lenient,

Herb," answered Father Barnes. "Most people, our fallen away included, do understand it, but they simply refuse to acknowledge it.

"But getting back to the motives of the fallen away: No one has ever denied that social contacts outside of the Church can be more productive of worldly gain. This very often is true because, generally speaking, those outside of the Church are more concerned with worldly gain. In fact, worldly gain is often their *only* concern. But intelligent, talented Catholics can, and consistently do, make their way to the top of the cultural, business and political world, and without bartering their souls for any added advantage. The world, as a rule, is neither so blind or unfair that it will not recognize real talent and make the most of it, irrespective of the person's religion. It is only the stupid Catholic, the Catholic obsessed with an inordinate passion for worldly possessions and acclaim, and who lacks ability proportionate to his ambition, that seeks refuge in another religion or in one of the secret societies, *because in them he believes he has found the crutch necessary for his success.*"

Father Barnes paused for a moment to let his young audience digest his last words, then continued. "But perhaps the most baseless pretext we know of for deserting the Church is the one that passes the buck off onto some priest: 'Father humiliated me' or 'Father aggravated me by his unreasonable demands.' As if the great Universal Faith of Christ is all wrapped up in the personality traits of individual priests. Surely, if those who use this excuse were not so blindly determined to abandon their faith, *to get even*, and if they thought it over calmly and intelligently, they

would recognize that any act of imprudence on the part of a priest—if indeed he is guilty and not just the innocent victim of a misunderstanding—is his own *personal* fault, not that of his priestly office which, like the Church at large, is irrevocably committed to Christ's holy charity."

"False pride sure makes people do some funny things," Robert said.

"Yes," agreed Father Barnes, "false pride has long been recognized as one of the soul's greatest enemies. This much is certain, however: a person never 'gets even' with a priest by deserting the Church, by estranging himself from Christ. One might just as well try getting even with the neighborhood grocer by boycotting the whole food industry. In either case it is the avenger and him alone who is hurt by the spite; in either case it is suicide, spiritual suicide in the one and bodily suicide in the other."

Robert and Herb were lost in contemplation for a moment, then Herb looked up and said, "The Apostle Peter had something very pertinent to say about fallen away, Father, but I don't recall it right at the moment. Could you refresh my memory?"

"I think you must have this one in mind, Herb," said Father Barnes. "' . . . it were better for them not to have known the way of justice, than having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. For what that true proverb says has happened to them: A dog returns to his vomit, and, A sow even after washing wallows in the mire (2 Peter 2:21-22).'"

"Yes, that's it. What a spot to be in!" Herb's heart seemed to go out to all the fallen away in the world

at that moment. "Father," he said, "isn't there something that can be done to bring them to their senses? I'm thinking of a certain friend of mine now. I would like to help him back into the Church but I don't know a good approach."

"Prayer," said Father Barnes. "Prayer and your own good example, that is the only approach. After that it is strictly up to the grace and mercy of Almighty God."

"But now let us get on with the next classification, the absentee Catholic."

### ***The Absentee Catholic***

"You can probably guess from the title I have given him who the absentee Catholic is."

"I would guess that he is the fellow who drops in for his Easter duty and forgets about the Church the rest of the year," averred Robert.

"None other," said Father Barnes. "The absentee Catholic, or 'Easter Lily' as he is sometimes nicknamed because his faith blooms only during the Easter Season, is the Catholic who tries to hold onto his blessed gift of faith with one hand, or I should say with one little finger, while allowing the rest of himself to go gallivanting off with the world of secularism. They are the spiritual counterpart of the 'patriot' who is ever so careful to hold onto his American citizenship for the protection it affords but prefers to live abroad in a foreign land where there are fewer taxes and social inhibitions."

"In fact, it is very difficult to ascertain from ap-



pearances whether this variety of Catholic is really Catholic at all. You observe them fraternizing with every known element and frequenting the most unwholesome places -- in sheer contempt of the Church's pleas to the contrary. When Sunday rolls around and the Church admonishes her faithful to keep holy the Lord's Day they are usually to be found at home lounging unconcernedly over the Sunday comic papers or, what is worse, sleeping off the saturation of the night before. So far as God and His Church are concerned they are about as interested as the wooden cigar store Indian." The old priest's comparison brought a chuckle from his audience.

"What keeps that kind of person in the Church, Father?" Herb asked. "Why do they even bother to make their Easter duty?"

"Because down deep in their hearts there still smolders a spark of Catholic faith," answered Father Barnes. "I might also add that the absentee is usually a victim of good health and worldly good fortune -- and I use the word 'victim' without reservation. So long as all is well with him he thinks he has no need for God. But let this cold spirited individual, or someone very dear to him, become suddenly and very seriously ill--then watch that spark of faith grow into a flame, then see how important the ministering hand of Holy Mother Church becomes. Like the citizen abroad who rushes home when war breaks around him, the absentee Catholic, likewise, seeks out his spiritual home, the Church. Suddenly there is a surging tide of contrition, the confessional practically floats on his tears as he invokes God's mercy, and as the salutary graces seep back into his soul and his

fears become assuaged a prettier specimen of Catholic would be hard to find."

"Misfortunes are very often blessings in disguise, aren't they, Father?" Herb put in sagely.

"Yes, God moves in mysterious ways as He demonstrates His infinite compassion for souls," said Father Barnes — tapping the ashes from his pipe.

"But, lo, what happens to our shining hero's faith when his crisis is passed? Does he heed God's warning and remain on the rolls of the true faithful? No. All too often he reverts to type. Before long you will observe him slipping furtively back into the same old spiritual rut, none the wiser—until the next crisis. His love for God simply is not great enough to sustain the graces which God, in His mercy, has planted in his soul.

"Somehow the absentee Catholic has come by the notion, no doubt placed in his mind by the ever dexterous Satan, that the Holy Faith is a handy device for the sick and the poor, but something which is of no use to the prospering, therefore just as well put on the shelf up in the attic of the mind. In other words, he entertains the illusion that he is sustained in the faith, not by grace received at the Altar of God, but by intellectual conviction alone. Poor soul, in his spiritual depravity he cannot see that *grace and faith are interdependent, that they mutually intensify the divine life.*"

"Let me get this straight, Father," Robert interrupted with a confused expression on his face. "By that do you mean that grace increases faith and vice versa?"

"Exactly," said Father Barnes. "Faith comes to man

only by grace and God apportions His grace according to the measure of one's response to the faith thus produced. So we see that if the absentee Catholic is to save his soul he most assuredly must banish his illusion; he must awaken to the terrible sin of his folly and realize that he cannot serve two gods: the True and Living God and the false god of worldly merriment and cupidity. For as our Blessed Lord said: 'No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will stand by the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.' (Luke 16:13.) Once there is this realization, the absentee Catholic should learn to meditate more on the Munificent Goodness of Almighty God and thereby come to love Him as He deserves to be loved, *demand's to be loved*. Then the graces received at Mass and the Sacraments will take hold and he will be preserved and strengthened in a devout faith; Otherwise he is lost and eventually will be condemned along with the most despicable of sinners." There was a note of terrible finality in Father Barnes' voice as he uttered the last words.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Herb. "The absentee Catholic isn't much better off than the fallen away, is he?"

"He is still a whole lot better off than the fallen away, Herb," said Father Barnes. "Remember, the absentee, for all his slothfulness, is in communion with the Church; he still has access to the sacraments, the food of faith, by which he can, by a single act of the will, turn to God who will nourish him back to spiritual health. Here again, boys, is a person very much in need of your prayers.

"Now," said the old priest with a wry smile, "to

get on to the next group in our little delineation of Catholic types: the nominal Catholics."

### **The Nominal Catholic**

Father Barnes leaned back in the big overstuffed chair, crossed his legs for a more comfortable position, then continued in an easier tone of voice. "The nominal Catholic is not, strictly speaking, a bad sort. He usually lives a pretty respectable life. He is careful to avoid any of the social improprieties that might bring scandal to his name and the good name of the Church, is active in civic affairs and, as a general rule, enjoys a hail-good-fellow reputation among his associates. But for a very good reason, neither can he be called a faithful Catholic. He is somewhere in between . . . he is *nominal*."

"Sounds a little paradoxical, doesn't it?" Robert interrupted.

Father Barnes seemed to ignore Robert's question. "As I have said," he continued, "this fellow lives a respectable life; even attends Mass and receives the Sacraments at intervals. But . . ." and here he shot a smile at Robert, ". . . that is just where his trouble lies. The intervals between his attendance at Mass and his reception of the Sacraments are not only too protracted, but seldom are they warranted. It appears the only time he is disposed to render homage to God and invoke His graces is when there are no *obstacles*, either real or imagined, to bar the way; that is to say, when the weather is fair and no social engagements solicit his august presence."

"Social engagements like picnics, fishing trips, non-

Catholic guests, et cetera," Herb interpolated with a little laugh.

"Right," Father Barnes said. "If the opportunity for a social fling presents itself, or if the weather is cold and dismal, the nominal Catholic's place in Church is almost always conspicuously vacant. In short, Christ and the sacramental life He prescribed for the faithful just do not receive the priority they should. It is a lukewarm condition, the same which Our Lord warned the faithful against: 'I know thy works; thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth.' (Apoc. 3:15-16)."

Herb shifted in his chair and with the unrestrained gravity of youth, said, "Gosh, that is sure a precarious condition for a person's faith to be in."

"Still, despite his shortcomings," said Father Barnes, "the nominal Catholic is one of the beloved of the Church, lax in his faith, to be sure, but not to the extent that it constitutes an out and out betrayal; therefore, he is not entirely without his reward. If God perceives honest contrition in his heart and a humble petition for mercy on his lips before death, occasioned perhaps by the administering of Holy Viaticum by a priest, he will in all likelihood be given an opportunity to atone for the spiritual laxity of his past in Purgatory. All hope will not be taken from him.

"There is, however, one thing which Mr. and Mrs. Nominal Catholic should be constantly wary of: *Will they be given an opportunity to repent before death snatches them out of this world?* This thought should

give each and every one of them an acute case of the spiritual jitters, especially when they hear the news reports telling of the thousands of people who meet sudden, unexpected death day after day in airplane crashes, train wrecks, automobile accidents, fires, heart attacks, etc., and it occurs to them (or does it?) that their own name might be included in tomorrow's toll."

"In other words," averred Robert, "the adage 'be prepared' has a special meaning for nominal Catholics."

"Be prepared," corrected Father Barnes, "has a special meaning for *all* Catholics. I think you mean that it has, or should have, a more *urgent* meaning for nominal Catholics. They should waste no time in taking their precious gift of faith more seriously, thereby eliminating any fear of a sudden, unexpected departure from this life into the next."

### **The Loyal Catholic**

Robert, who was the more sensitive of the two youths, had grown pensive; but now he could contain himself no longer. "I don't mind admitting, Father," he said, his anxiety plainly evident in his voice, "that the ground covered so far hasn't been very cheery. I sure hope you hold out greater prospects for the loyal Catholics." He emphasized the word "loyal."

Father Barnes smiled reassuringly. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "Now we enter into the realm of *true* Catholicism. After dwelling — with some misgivings — on

the weak faith of the fallen away, the absentee and the nominal Catholic, what a pleasure to join company with the regulars, to behold the true spirit of the glorious faith of Christ in action. Now we get into representative Catholicism, boys — not necessarily Catholicism in its purest form — that will be taken up next — but the steady, dependable kind that forms the bulwark of the Church Militant.

“Who are they? Everyone knows them. You see them at Mass as regularly and punctually as the calendar. They are old familiar figures in the confessional lineup and at the Communion rail. For, in keeping with the precepts of their holy faith, they acknowledge that belief without the sanctifying grace imparted by the sacramental life is a sterile belief, a dead and futile belief.

“Not only at Mass and the Sacraments but in other ways the loyal Catholic evidences the ardour of his faith. When he hears Holy Mother Church vilified and unjustly criticized, as she so often is in public gatherings, he speaks right up, politely but without equivocation, in her defense. He can defend the Church because he *knows* the Church; he knows her motives and he keeps himself posted on her worldwide activities through the constant reading of authoritative Catholic periodicals. Further, he has familiarized himself with all of the old stock lies and diatribes in the arsenal of the anti-Catholic bigots so that he is able to counter with the most potent weapon of all — *the truth.*”

In his enthusiasm Father Barnes had unconsciously taken his Breviary from an adjacent table and was gripping it tightly in one hand. Now he relaxed his

grip and held the little black bound book loosely in both hands.

“And last, but not least,” he went on, “by his wholesome living, congenial manners and charity toward all peoples, regardless of their religious convictions or their state in life, the loyal Catholic brings a bounty of credit on the Church in the community. He, more than anyone else, serves the Church in the capacity of ambassador of good will to those outside of the faith — a sort of missionary priest without portfolio.”

“The Chaplain at school had what I thought was a very good name for that, Father,” Robert said. “He called it ‘the apostolate of good example.’”

“An excellent name, indeed,” agreed Father Barnes.

Herb said, “Wasn’t it the great St. Francis who, when one of his monks asked why they had not done any preaching in a certain town they had passed through but had spent all of their time just being friendly, answered: ‘By our good Christian example we were preaching a most eloquent sermon?’”

“Yes, Herb,” said Father Barnes. “I recall the incident. The Saint meant, of course, that simple Christian charity oftentimes produces a quicker response in people’s hearts than the most learned theological discourse. In fact, it is almost always necessary to win a person’s heart by charity before his mind can be won by doctrine. *In fact, charity is the essence of Christian doctrine.* Thus we see that the loyal Catholic’s ‘apostolate of good example’ is so very important to the spread of God’s Kingdom on earth.”

“What kind of reward can the loyal Catholic expect from God in the next life, Father?” asked Robert. It



was important that he should know this because the classification seemed to fit him and Herb pretty closely.

“While not presuming to be a judge of eternal destinies, Robert,” said Father Barnes, “I think it can be predicted fairly accurately what God has in store for the loyal Catholic. First, just to keep the record straight, we must bear in mind that the loyal Catholic, while he does render a great and invaluable service to God and Church, has not given up *all* for God and Church. But neither can it be said that he has been remiss in the true sense of the word. Loyal Catholics are surely, therefore, a source of pleasure to Almighty God; and surely God has a place reserved for them in heaven. Due to a little carelessness, some will undoubtedly be obliged to make atonement in Purgatory before being ushered into the Beatific Presence, but we can safely assume that a very large percentage will be received into His Presence without any postponement. Yes, loyal Catholics are among the elect of God’s children, true and worthy members of the Mystical Body of Christ.”

Both of the old priest’s guests were visibly relieved. “Hey, Father,” Herb cautioned good humoredly, “be careful — you’re not leaving much for your last group to shoot for.” He leaned back in his chair with a smile, eager to hear how Father Barnes would take up the challenge.

### ***The Consecrated Catholic***

Father Barnes looked up at the clock on the mantle, satisfied himself that there was still time to finish his little discourse before confessions, then rested his eyes

affectionately on the two youths. "After learning of the very commendable Christian virtue of the loyal Catholic," he said at length, "one is indeed very apt to wonder if there is anything more a person can do to please God, or if God asks anything more."

Father Barnes closed his eyes now, the better to shape the profound words that followed. ". . . But we know that such a question, in itself, implies a certain spiritual deficiency, a somewhat near-sighted conception of God's Will. For if we are to place a limit on the love and service mankind owes to his Creator, then that limit must not fall within any established bounds, but must be the *limit of limit*, or the individual person's *full capacity* to love and serve.

"Hence, there remains open to the Catholic a still higher state of spiritual perfection than the aforementioned which we prefer to call here *the consecrated state*, meaning *complete* dedication to God — without stint or reservation. In this state the Catholic, through a deeper realization of the Munificent Goodness of God and a more devout sacramental life, has elicited from God more abundant graces, to the extent that loving God and serving God and glorifying God in all things is the one all consuming preoccupation of his being. Whereas others are afflicted to varying degrees with purely worldly considerations, reaching out for some of the world's luxuries and esteem, the consecrated Catholic desires only to possess the luxury of God's grace and God's esteem. Everything is subordinated to this one end."

"I know of a little nun who fits that description to a T." Robert said. "She came to my father's business establishment once to beg for the poor and aged

who were under the care of her order.”

“Yes,” said Father Barnes, “we find those who are most gifted with this holy disposition among the rank and file of the religious orders, especially the missionary and contemplative orders. This happens to be the case because their vocation of service to God has taken on the aspect of a *profession*; a profession, moreover, that is patterned on the *divine profession* of Christ. Hence it is only natural that their vocation should be more conducive to sanctification.”

“In other words, theirs is a vocation of extending and ministering the faith as well as living it,” offered Herb.

The old priest smiled, pleased with the way his words were being assimilated. “Precisely,” he said. “Then, of course, there are the Mystics of whom you have probably read a great deal, those whose faith has progressed to the point where, spiritually at least, they already experience some of the gifts and ecstasies of the inhabitants of heaven. We could even put the Mystics in a class by themselves, for they are the recipients of *extraordinary* grace from God. But, because it is, unfortunately, not a common state, we won’t take the time here to discuss them separately. Suffice it to say that, insofar as earthly man is capable, the Mystics have achieved the ultimate in spiritual perfection.

“This does not, however, mean to imply that religious orders have a monopoly on consecrated souls,” Father Barnes hastened to add, “or on the mystic state either for that matter. St. Maria Goretti, St. Catherine of Sienna and a host of other distinguished saints illustrate that the way to lofty heights of spiri-

tual perfection is open to all. In fact, it can be assumed that, because of their very unobtrusiveness, many more lay people than we have knowledge of have attained to the consecrated state . . . to sainthood. Consecration to God and Church by means of a formal profession of vows, as in the case of religious vocations, has definite advantages; but lay people also have an important role in the divine order of things—an extremely important role: that of being espoused to Christ in Holy Matrimony and giving to God an increase of sons and daughters *without which there would be no one to fill the religious vocations.*”

Robert was visibly perplexed. “Do you mean that married people can attain to the same degree of spiritual perfection as religious? I understood you to say that one must give up *all* for God before he can be classified as a consecrated Catholic.”

“Perhaps I did not make myself clear,” replied Father Barnes patiently. “The profession of religious vows is a great, and oftentimes indispensable, aid in the attainment of the consecrated state, depending on the aptitude of the individual, but *not always essential* to its attainment. When married couples who live a devout Catholic life bring children into the world and sacrifice to provide for them and rear them as devout Catholics also, thereby fulfilling the end purpose of the Sacrament of Matrimony, they are, *in their own special way*, offering up *all* to God and contributing to the spread of His Kingdom on earth.

“Hence, it is not the vocation so much that elevates the soul, but rather the disposition of the person with the vocation, whether he or she loves God above all else and devotes his energies wholly to Him. Priests,

monks and nuns, and all who are joined with them in their holy profession, have chosen the safest and quickest way to holiness; but lay Catholics can, if they don't let the superficialities of the world deter them, be just as pleasing in the sight of God, even more so because not all religious are as faithful to the ideals of their vocation as they should be. I repeat, it is the disposition of the person with the vocation that counts."

Herb brushed a fly off his knee with a mighty sweep of his hand, then unburdened a question that had been taunting him the last few minutes. "But, Father," he said, "if 'loyal' Catholics can attain heaven, why go through all the mortification and sacrifice in order to become a consecrated Catholic? Why not let the state of the loyal Catholic be our spiritual criterion so that we can at least taste *some* of the world's pleasures?"

This brought a laugh from Robert. "What a guy! Always thinking of having a good time," he joshed.

"I'm afraid you both have an erroneous idea of what constitutes happiness and suffering in the life of the truly devout." Father Barnes' voice had an edge of severity to it that demanded special attention. "In the first place, bear in mind that holy mortification and sacrifice do not cause suffering; but, like some medicines which are difficult to swallow because the senses rebel against them, they *relieve* suffering, the suffering of the spirit which is the most painful and devastating kind of suffering. I dare say, you have both read the lives of the Saints. In order to become saints they all subjected themselves to a certain amount of mortification and their lives were one long succes-

sion of sacrifices and penances. But, pray tell, when has the world produced happier people? Show me an unhappy saint or devout living Catholic who mopes around feeling sorry for him or her self and I will show you a very rare phenomenon, indeed. True, the consecrated Catholic gives up most of the world's pleasures, but, in the final analysis, it is no sacrifice at all; for they are replaced by far greater pleasures: *the ineffable pleasures of living close to God, of possessing the fulness of His love.*

"Then, too," Father Barnes continued, "bear in mind that there are degrees of favor *after* a person has arrived in heaven, as Our Blessed Lord pointed out (Matt. 5:19), to which all of heaven's inhabitants are consigned according to each one's merit. In other words, because God is Justice, the heavenly reward shall be commensurate with the degree of the soul's perfection when it leaves the body. The consecrated Catholic, deserving more of heaven's reward, therefore, will receive more of heaven's reward. Not to mention the fact that consecrated Catholics are surer of getting to heaven in the first place."

Father Barnes rose to his feet, for the clock told him that he was due in the confessional. "I trust that the superiority of the consecrated state is clear to you now, boys," he said, walking over to the cloak closet and taking out his cassock.

Robert and Herb were on their feet, too, stretching the crinks out of their muscles, regretting that their visit was about to end.

"Yes, Father," Robert said, "you have made it very clear. And you can bet that, starting now, that's what yours truly will be shooting for."

"Me too," Herb said determinedly. He was not one to be outdone by his pal in anything if he could help it.

By this time all three were on their way out of the rectory. But Father Barnes had one more thing to add. "You mentioned spiritual criteria, Herb," he said. "Now let me qualify that term for you in parting. "There is only one spiritual criterion in the Catholic Church: *God Himself as personified in Jesus Christ*. Forget about all the pious Tom, Dick and Harrys in the world. Strive—constantly strive—to emulate only Christ in all things and, with the help of His Blessed Mother in heaven, the success of your spiritual life will be assured. Right, Robert?"

"Right!" answered Robert in his most authoritative tone of voice.

Father Barnes clasped the boys' hands. "It was wonderful to visit with you fellas again," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Come again soon, won't you." With that he turned and hurried toward the Church where a long line of penitents awaited him.

"Goodbye, boys," he called over his shoulder.

"Goodbye, Father," Robert and Herb called back, "and thanks a lot."

THE END

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