

Approaching the Catholic Church After Release from Prison

Many inmates who have never spent much time around the church before they went to prison, wonder how they should approach the church, after their release from prison.

One inmate told me that he had a very bad experience in the church, after his release from prison, one time before his present incarceration. He said that he gone to Holy Mass in a Catholic church, and some very friendly people had approached him, and asked if he would like to join their prayer group. He said yes, and started attending their meetings. They were very friendly toward him, and seemed to be willing and anxious to share their life's experiences.

After a few meetings, the ex-convict felt free to tell them he had been in prison. He was shocked, and surprised by the way they responded. They were very cold toward him, after he revealed to them that he was an ex-convict. They were no longer the friendly, understanding and compassionate people he thought them to be. This experience made him feel unwelcome in the Catholic Church, which he felt much at home, and comfortable with, prior to this experience with the prayer group.

You should approach any parish with caution. At first, don't put the rush on any priests or parishioners. Just participate at Holy Mass; look over the situation and the people. It is easier to commit yourself to a parish organization than it is to withdraw gracefully from an activity or organization in the church. Consider carefully your talents and gifts, and find out what is expected of you, before you commit yourself to any activity. Your service to the church should bring you happiness, and much satisfaction. You don't want to feel like a round peg being forced into a square hole.

Don't let anyone put the rush on you, or manipulate you, so that you become involved in a ministry which you are unsuited for. Everywhere there are zealous, well-meaning people who are anxious for their particular ministry, or activity to succeed.

Large parishes are more formal and impersonal. Small parishes are more informal and very personal. There are some wonderful Christian people in every parish; but there are also some gossips, and scandal mongers everywhere. Jesus Christ explains best what we can expect to find in the church everywhere.

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not

sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’” (Matthew 13:24-30)

So we could expect God to tolerate enemies of the church to continue to exist in the Catholic Church, until Jesus Christ comes again, and there is no longer any need for the Church.

