

## **“Back to Basics”**

Back to basics, my friends. It must not be so much about how much we get out of parish life, or the singing, or the teaching or the fellowship, but how much we put in ourselves for the building up of the local parish, the Body of Christ. There is another, all too common, all too tragic phenomenon, described by St. Paul as “...Holding to the form of faith but denying its power.” It has affected my own relatives and friends.

I apologize in advance if my words hit a nerve among you. It is not to cast blame, but rather to point out a common but very real problem among our faithful. Essentially it is in the same spirit as the extraordinary phenomenon that we see today of high churchmen suing the Church for millions of dollars – this is disregard for the things of God. I speak in regard to our young people. I realize, of course, that there are no guarantees as to raising a child, in the language of Proverbs, in the right way, that he may not depart from it. As parents, as priests, as hierarchs, we can do everything right which can include instruction, good example, admonition and utmost care in all things, but there is no guarantee that the child will remain a child of God and a member of His Body, the Church. Departure is always tragic, but I think even more tragic is the way that it is perceived and accepted.

Most of us are acquainted with the example of St. Monica, the mother of the Blessed Augustine who would become Bishop of Hippo. Her life reveals her as a loving, caring, exemplary mother, who, mortified by her son's loose living begged God in His mercy, day and night with tears, to save her son from himself and bring him into the light of truth and righteousness. We can laud her, speak with admiration for her persistence and sing her praises regarding her genuine love for her son. But now permit me to illustrate an all-too-often common situation of today.

A son was “raised in the Church,” started serving in the Altar at age five, a member of the parish youth groups, the Jr. “O” Club, etc, etc, etc. Then he went away to college, went to his home parish over vacations, got a good job away from home and with regard to the parish, was never seen again. A friend at church asks the young man's father, “By the way, how is Bobby doing? The man replies, “Oh, he's doing great! You know he's married, the second baby's on the way. He just got a promotion at work, and by next year he'll be getting a six-figure salary.” Yeah, He's doing great!

The real story – from the Christian perspective: Bobby hasn't darkened the door of the church in over five years. He spent the first year after college sitting in a tree in Oahu getting in touch with his “true self.” He met his partner and was married sitting on a motorcycle at the top of Pike's Peak by a totally with-it, flower-power Wiccan practitioner. Their retro-vows, utilizing such terms as “groovy” and “with-it” were lovely. The first baby was not baptized, of course, with the thought of not violating his civil rights and freedom of choice. When Bobby's parents heard the Gospel lesson where Our Lord Jesus Christ says, “Unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man you have no life in you,” that's all very nice but better not to think too much about it. After all,

Bobby's got a good job and will soon make a six-figure annual salary. He's doing great!!

My sisters and brothers, have I made my point? We have St. Monica on one hand and Bobby's parents on the other. My illustration might be a bit extreme, but then again, is it really? I personally know of several cases that aren't terribly different. Perhaps its unrealistic for Bobby's parents to emulate Monica in beseeching God day and night with tears that Bobby would return like the Prodigal Son to the Father. But then again, why not? At least to share her spirit and acknowledge that Bobby isn't really doing that great and his soul and those of his family are in danger of being lost. What we have here is a tragedy.

Back to basics, my friends. All our assessments about parish life, diocesan life, liturgical participation, strategic planning – everything depends on one ultimate statement – either we believe or we don't believe. Either our faith has consequences or it doesn't. Then those wonderful words about seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, about the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and a thousand other messages are more than words – they are life. We have a tendency to create complexities and ignore the basics. Jesus Christ – the Way, the Truth and the Life – the same yesterday, today and forever.

*[from Archbishop Job's Address to the Midwest Diocesan Assembly in Kansas City, October 6, 2009; you can read the full text at [www.midwestdiocese.org](http://www.midwestdiocese.org)]*