THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



The Parish

Asset, Not Consumer

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

The Question That Changes a Man

There is a single question that reveals how a man truly relates to his parish, and his honest answer to it determines whether he is part of its life or merely a customer of its services. The question is this: do you go to your parish mainly to get something, or to give something? Most Catholics, if they are honest, go mainly to get: to receive the sacraments, to hear a decent homily, to have their children taught, to get what they need from the parish and then to leave. They evaluate the parish as they would any other service provider, by how well it meets their needs, and when it disappoints them they complain or shop for a better one. This is the consumer relationship to the parish, and it is the default of our age.

This book is about a different relationship, in which a man comes to his parish not primarily as a consumer of its services but as an asset to its mission, one who gives rather than merely gets, who builds up the community rather than merely drawing from it, who sees himself as a contributing member of a family rather than a customer evaluating a product. This shift, from consumer to asset, from taker to giver, is one of the most important a man can make in his relationship to the Church, and it transforms not only his parish but himself. The parish is not a spiritual gas station where a man fills up and drives off; it is a community he is called to help build, and the man who grasps this becomes part of the solution to everything he used to complain about.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. — 1 Corinthians 12:27

We will begin by exposing the consumer mentality that governs most Catholics' relationship to their parish, and the harm it does. We will recover what the parish actually is, a family and a body rather than a service provider. We will take up the shift from consumer to contributor, and what it means to become an asset to one's parish. We will consider the concrete ways a man can give to and build up his parish. We will face the reality of the imperfect parish and how to love and serve it anyway. And we will see that a man's engagement with his parish is not a distraction from the wider mission but a central part of it, and that strong parishes, built by committed members, are the foundation of the Church's whole work.

CHAPTER ONE

The Consumer in the Pew

The Mentality That Weakens the Church

To understand the problem, a man must first recognize the consumer mentality that governs how most Catholics relate to their parish, often without their being aware of it. This mentality is so pervasive, so much the water we swim in, that it seems simply normal, the obvious way to relate to a parish, and yet it is deeply at odds with what the parish is meant to be and does real harm to the Church. Seeing the consumer mentality clearly, and recognizing it in oneself, is the necessary first step toward a healthier relationship with one's parish.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. — Acts 20:35

Treating the Church Like a Business

The consumer mentality treats the parish as essentially a business, a provider of religious goods and services that the parishioner, as a customer, evaluates and consumes according to how well it meets his needs and preferences. On this model, the parish exists to serve the parishioner, to provide him with good liturgy, good preaching, good programs, and good religious services, and his role is to receive these services, evaluate their quality, and take his business elsewhere if they do not satisfy. This is exactly how a man relates to any business, to a restaurant or a store, and the consumer Catholic relates to his parish in the same way, as a customer evaluating a service provider, present to get what he needs and quick to complain or leave if the service disappoints. This treating of the Church like a business is so normal in our consumer culture that it passes unnoticed, but it is a fundamental distortion of what the parish is, importing into the life of the Church a commercial relationship utterly foreign to it, and reducing the parishioner from a member of a family to a customer of a service. The consumer mentality, treating the Church as a business, is the root of the problem.

The Complaining and the Shopping

The consumer mentality shows itself most clearly in two characteristic behaviors, the chronic complaining about the parish's failings and the shopping around for a better one, both of which reveal the customer relationship at work. The consumer Catholic, evaluating his parish as a service provider, is perpetually dissatisfied, for no parish perfectly meets his preferences, and so he complains, about the music, the preaching, the programs, the people, treating the parish's shortcomings as a failure of the service he is owed. And when his dissatisfaction grows great enough, he shops, moving from parish to parish in search of one that better meets his preferences, treating parishes as interchangeable providers to be chosen by their quality. Both behaviors, the complaining and the shopping, reveal the consumer relationship, the stance of a customer evaluating a

service rather than a member committed to a family, and both do real harm, spreading dissatisfaction and preventing the deep commitment on which parish life depends. The complaining consumer poisons the community with his dissatisfaction, and the shopping consumer never puts down the roots from which real contribution grows, and both are symptoms of the consumer mentality that must be overcome.

The Harm It Does

The consumer mentality does real and serious harm to the Church, weakening parishes, draining them of the committed members they need, and reducing the body of Christ to a collection of customers rather than a community of contributors. A parish full of consumers is a weak parish, for it has many takers and few givers, many who evaluate and complain and few who commit and build, and such a parish cannot flourish, lacking the committed members whose contribution is its lifeblood. The consumer mentality drains a parish of exactly what it needs, replacing contributing members with evaluating customers, and it reduces the parish community, which is meant to be a family and a body, to a mere clientele, a collection of individuals getting their needs met rather than a community building something together. This harm is largely invisible, for the consumers do not see themselves as harming anything, only as reasonably evaluating the service they receive, but the cumulative effect is devastating, producing weak parishes full of dissatisfied customers rather than strong ones full of committed members. The consumer mentality, then, is not a harmless personal preference but a genuine harm to the Church, and overcoming it, in oneself and in one's parish, is a real contribution to the health of the body of Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

What a Parish Actually Is

Family and Body, Not Service Provider

To overcome the consumer mentality, a man must recover a true understanding of what the parish actually is, for the consumer relationship rests on a false picture of the parish as a service provider, and only a truer picture can ground a healthier relationship. The parish is not a business, a service provider, or a religious utility; it is, in the Church's understanding, a family and a body, a community of persons bound together in Christ, and this reality calls for a relationship utterly different from that of a customer to a business. Recovering what the parish actually is lays the foundation for the shift from consumer to asset.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. — Ephesians 2:19

The Parish as Family

The parish is, first of all, a family, a community of persons bound together as brothers and sisters in Christ, members of the household of God, and this familial reality calls for the relationship of a family member rather than a customer. One does not relate to one's family as to a service provider, evaluating it by how well it meets one's needs and shopping for a better one when it disappoints; one belongs to one's family, contributes to it, bears with its faults, and commits to it through thick and thin, precisely because it is family and not a service. The parish, as the household of God, calls for the same relationship, that of a member who belongs and contributes rather than a customer who evaluates and consumes, and the recovery of this familial understanding is the heart of overcoming the consumer mentality. A man who sees his parish as his family relates to it entirely differently than one who sees it as a service provider, committing to it, contributing to it, bearing with its faults, and giving to it as one gives to family, and this familial relationship is what the parish actually calls for and what the consumer mentality has replaced. The parish is a family, and a man is called to belong to it as such.

The Parish as Body

The parish is also a body, a living organism in which each member has a part to play and a contribution to make, so that the parish is not complete without the active participation of all its members, each contributing his part to the whole. Saint Paul's image of the Church as a body, in which every member has a function and the body suffers when any member fails to play its part, applies directly to the parish: it is a body in which each member is meant to contribute, and a parish full of inactive members is like a body full of non-functioning parts, weak and incomplete. This bodily understanding reveals that the parishioner is not meant to be a passive recipient but an active member, a functioning part of the body contributing to its life, and that the parish needs the active contribution of each member to be whole. The consumer mentality reduces the member to a passive recipient, a mere consumer of the body's services, but the reality is that each member is called to function, to contribute his part, to be an active member of the body rather than a passive beneficiary. The parish is a body, and a man is called to be a functioning member of it, contributing his part to the whole, which is utterly different from the passive consumption of the customer.

A Community of Mission

Finally, the parish is a community of mission, existing not merely to serve its members but to carry out the mission of the Church in its place, so that the parish has a purpose beyond meeting the needs of its members, a mission in which those members are called to share. The consumer mentality sees the parish as existing to serve the parishioner, but the parish actually exists for mission, to worship God, to form its members, and to reach out to the world, and the members are not merely its beneficiaries but its missionaries, called to share in and advance its mission. This missional understanding further overturns the consumer relationship, for a member of a community of mission is not a customer getting his needs met but a participant in a shared purpose, contributing to a mission larger than himself. The parishioner is called not merely to receive the parish's services but to join its mission, to be part of its reaching out to the world, to contribute to the purpose for which the parish exists. The parish is a community of mission, and a man is called to share in that mission, which transforms his relationship to the parish from that of a beneficiary to that of a participant in a shared and purposeful work. Family, body, and community of mission, the parish is all of these, and none of them calls for the relationship of a consumer.

CHAPTER THREE

From Consumer to Contributor

Becoming an Asset to Your Parish

Having seen the consumer mentality and recovered what the parish actually is, we come to the central shift this book calls for, from consumer to contributor, from one who takes to one who gives, from a customer of the parish to an asset to it. This shift is the heart of the matter, the change that transforms a man's relationship to his parish and makes him part of its flourishing rather than a drain on it. Understanding what this shift involves and how to make it is the practical core of recovering a healthy relationship with one's parish.

Each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. — 1 Peter 4:10

The Fundamental Reorientation

The shift from consumer to contributor is a fundamental reorientation of a man's whole stance toward his parish, from asking what the parish can do for him to asking what he can do for the parish, from evaluating the service to offering his contribution. This reorientation changes everything, for the man who comes to his parish asking how he can

contribute relates to it entirely differently than the one who comes asking what he can get, approaching it as a giver rather than a taker, a builder rather than an evaluator, an asset rather than a customer. The question that governs his relationship to the parish shifts from what am I getting to what am I giving, from how well is this parish serving me to how well am I serving this parish, and this change of the governing question transforms his whole engagement. This is not merely a matter of doing a few more things at the parish but of a deep reorientation of stance, from consumer to contributor, that changes how a man sees and relates to his parish in everything. The fundamental reorientation, from asking what the parish can do for him to asking what he can do for the parish, is the heart of the shift this book calls for, and it is the change that makes a man an asset rather than a consumer.

You Have Something to Give

The shift to contributor rests on the recognition that a man has something to give, that he possesses gifts, time, and abilities that his parish needs and that he is called to contribute, so that his contribution is not optional charity but the use of gifts given to be used. Scripture teaches that each Christian has received gifts to be used in service of others, that these gifts are given not for the individual's private benefit but for the building up of the community, and that a man is a steward of them, responsible to use them for the good of the body. This means that every parishioner has something to contribute, some gift, ability, or resource that his parish needs, and that the failure to contribute is not merely a missed opportunity but a failure of stewardship, a burying of the gifts given to be used. A man need not wait until he feels he has something extraordinary to offer, for every member has gifts the body needs, whether skills, time, presence, prayer, or service, and the parish needs them all. The recognition that one has something to give, that one's gifts are needed and are given to be used for the body, is essential to the shift to contributor, for it moves a man from the passive stance of one who has nothing to offer to the active stance of a steward with gifts to contribute.

The Transformation It Brings

The shift from consumer to contributor transforms not only a man's parish but the man himself, for in giving to his parish rather than merely taking from it, he finds a deeper engagement, satisfaction, and belonging than the consumer ever knows. The consumer, forever evaluating and often dissatisfied, never experiences the deep belonging and satisfaction that come from contributing, from being an active and committed member of a community one is helping to build; the contributor, by giving himself to his parish, finds himself woven into its life, invested in its flourishing, belonging to it in a way the consumer never does. This is one of the great rewards of the shift, that the contributor

gains far more than the consumer, finding in his giving a belonging, a purpose, and a satisfaction that the taker never finds in his getting. The man who shifts from consumer to contributor discovers that he has gained rather than lost, that in giving to his parish he has found a deeper relationship with it and a deeper satisfaction than all his consuming ever gave him. The transformation the shift brings, then, is not only to the parish, which gains a contributing member, but to the man, who gains the belonging and satisfaction that only contribution can give, so that the shift from consumer to contributor is as much a gift to the giver as to the parish he serves.

CHAPTER FOUR

Building Up the Parish

The Concrete Ways a Man Contributes

The shift from consumer to contributor must become concrete, must take the form of actual contribution, and so we turn to the practical ways a man can give to and build up his parish. Contribution is not a vague good intention but a matter of specific acts, of actually giving one's time, gifts, presence, and resources to the parish in concrete ways, and a man does well to consider the various forms his contribution might take. These are not exotic or heroic but ordinary and accessible, within the reach of any committed member, and together they constitute the practical substance of being an asset to one's parish.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works… encouraging one another. — Hebrews 10:24-25

Time and Service

The most basic form of contribution is the giving of one's time and service, the actual work of helping with the many tasks and ministries that a parish depends on, which cannot function without the volunteer labor of committed members. A parish runs on the service of its members, in its liturgies, its programs, its ministries, its outreach, its maintenance, and its countless practical needs, and the man who contributes his time and service to these tasks is building up his parish in the most direct way. This service need not be dramatic or prominent; much of what a parish needs is humble, behind-the-scenes work, and the willingness to do the unglamorous tasks is itself a valuable contribution. The point is to give one's time and labor to the parish, to take on some real service, to be one of the members whose work keeps the parish functioning and advancing its mission, rather than one who leaves all the work to others. The giving of

time and service is the most basic and most needed form of contribution, and the man who takes on real service in his parish, however humble, has made the fundamental shift from consumer to contributor and become an asset to his parish's life and mission.

Gifts and Talents

Beyond general service, a man contributes by offering his particular gifts and talents, the specific abilities he possesses that his parish can use, so that his contribution is not only generic labor but the offering of what he is uniquely able to give. Every man has particular gifts, skills, and abilities, professional, personal, and spiritual, and the parish can use a vast range of them, from the practical skills of trades and professions to the talents of teaching, leading, organizing, welcoming, and much more. The man who offers his particular gifts to his parish contributes something that only he, or few others, can give, and he finds in this offering a particularly fitting and fruitful form of contribution, using what he is good at for the good of the body. This means a man does well to consider what his particular gifts are and how his parish might use them, to offer not only his general availability but his specific abilities, finding the contribution that fits his gifts. The offering of one's particular gifts and talents is a rich form of contribution, allowing a man to give what he is uniquely able to give, and the parish is built up by the varied gifts of its members, each contributing what he is best able to offer.

Presence, Prayer, and Support

Not all contribution is active service, for a man also builds up his parish by his faithful presence, his prayer for it, and his support and encouragement of others, forms of contribution available even to those who cannot take on active roles. Faithful presence itself is a contribution, for a parish is built up by members who are reliably there, who show up, who are part of the community's consistent life, and whose presence strengthens the whole. Prayer for the parish, for its mission, its priests, its members, and its needs, is a real and powerful contribution, building up the parish spiritually even when one can do nothing active. And the support and encouragement of others, the welcoming of newcomers, the befriending of the lonely, the encouraging of the discouraged, the building of genuine community among the members, is a vital contribution that any member can make, knitting the parish together into the family it is meant to be. These quieter forms of contribution, presence, prayer, and support, are available to every member, including those who cannot take on active service, and they are genuine and valuable contributions to the life of the parish. A man builds up his parish not only by active service and particular gifts but by his faithful presence, his prayer, and his support of others, and these too are the contributions of an asset rather than a consumer.

CHAPTER FIVE

Loving the Imperfect Parish

Commitment Through the Disappointments

A man who sets out to be an asset to his parish will quickly encounter its imperfections, for every parish is flawed, full of sinful people, marked by disappointments, and often falling short in many ways, and the question is whether he will love and serve it anyway. The consumer responds to a parish's imperfections by complaining or leaving; the contributor must learn to love and serve the imperfect parish, committing to it through its disappointments as one commits to an imperfect family. Learning to love the imperfect parish is essential, for there is no other kind, and a man who will serve only a perfect parish will serve none at all.

Bear with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other.
— Colossians 3:13

There Is No Perfect Parish

The first thing to accept is that there is no perfect parish, that every parish is flawed and disappointing in various ways, so that the search for a parish without imperfections is futile and the demand for one is unreasonable. Every parish is made up of sinful people, led by imperfect clergy, marked by shortcomings in its liturgy, its programs, its community, and its leadership, and no parish will ever fully meet a man's preferences or live up to his ideals. This is simply the reality of the parish as a human community, and a man must accept it, abandoning the fantasy of a perfect parish that would fully satisfy him and accepting instead the imperfect parish that actually exists. The consumer, demanding a parish that meets his preferences, is perpetually disappointed and forever shopping, never finding the perfect parish because there is none; the contributor accepts the imperfection of his parish as a given and commits to it anyway, as one commits to an imperfect family. The acceptance that there is no perfect parish, that every parish is flawed and his own will always disappoint him in various ways, is the necessary foundation for loving and serving the imperfect parish he actually has.

Be Part of the Solution

The contributor's response to his parish's imperfections is not to complain or leave but to be part of the solution, to contribute to the improvement of the very things he might otherwise complain about, turning his dissatisfaction into constructive contribution. Where the consumer sees a problem and complains, the contributor sees a problem and

asks how he can help solve it; where the consumer laments the parish's shortcomings, the contributor rolls up his sleeves and works to address them. If the music is poor, perhaps he can help improve it; if the community is cold, perhaps he can help warm it; if a ministry is lacking, perhaps he can help provide it; the contributor responds to the parish's imperfections by contributing to their remedy rather than merely complaining about them. This turns a man's very dissatisfactions into occasions of contribution, making him part of the solution to the problems he sees rather than merely a critic of them, and it is a far more fruitful response than the complaining that only spreads discontent. To be part of the solution, to respond to the parish's imperfections by working to improve them rather than merely complaining, is the contributor's way, and it transforms a man from a critic of his parish's failings into a builder of its improvement.

Faithfulness Through the Seasons

Loving the imperfect parish finally requires faithfulness through the seasons, a committed perseverance that remains and serves through the disappointments, the difficult pastors, the dry periods, and the various trials that a long relationship with a parish inevitably involves. A man's relationship with his parish, like any long relationship, will pass through seasons, some good and some hard, times of flourishing and times of disappointment, good pastors and poor ones, periods of life and periods of dryness, and faithfulness means remaining and serving through all of them rather than abandoning the parish when it enters a hard season. The consumer leaves when the parish disappoints; the faithful contributor remains, committed to his parish through its seasons as he is committed to his family through theirs, serving it in the hard times as well as the good. This faithfulness through the seasons is the mark of real commitment, the difference between a member who belongs and a customer who stays only as long as satisfied, and it is what a parish most needs, members who will remain and serve through thick and thin. To love the imperfect parish is finally to be faithful to it through all its seasons, remaining and serving through the disappointments and the dry times, committed to it as to a family, and this faithful perseverance is the deepest form of loving and serving the imperfect parish that every parish, being imperfect, requires.

CHAPTER SIX

The Parish and the Mission

Why Strong Parishes Matter

A man might wonder whether this focus on the parish is a distraction from the wider mission, whether investing himself in his local parish is a turning inward away from the mission to the world. In fact the opposite is true, for the parish is a central instrument of the Church's mission, the local base from which the mission goes out, and strong parishes, built by committed members, are the foundation of the Church's whole missionary work. A man's investment in his parish is therefore not a distraction from the mission but a contribution to it, and understanding why strong parishes matter to the mission completes the case for becoming an asset to one's own.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father. — Matthew 5:16

The Parish as Mission Base

The parish is the local base of the Church's mission, the place from which the Church reaches out to its community and the platform from which much of the Church's missionary work goes forth, so that the strength of a parish directly affects the effectiveness of the mission in its place. A strong parish, full of committed members, is a powerful base for mission, able to reach out to its community, to welcome and form new members, to carry the faith into its neighborhood, while a weak parish, full of consumers, is a feeble base, barely able to sustain itself, let alone reach outward. The mission to any local community goes largely through its parish, and the parish's capacity for mission depends on the commitment and contribution of its members, so that a man who builds up his parish is building up the local base of the mission. This means that investing in one's parish is investing in the mission, strengthening the base from which the mission to one's community goes out, and that the strength of parishes is directly tied to the effectiveness of the Church's mission on the ground. The parish is the mission base, and a man who makes his parish strong is making the mission strong in his place, contributing to the Church's outreach by building up the community from which it flows.

Strong Parishes Form Apostles

Strong parishes are also the places where apostles are formed, where Christians are discipled, formed, and equipped for the mission, so that the parish is not only a base for mission but a seedbed of missionaries, and its strength determines how well it forms the apostles the mission needs. A vibrant parish forms its members in the faith, disciples them toward maturity, and equips them to carry the mission into their lives and their world, producing the formed and committed Christians on whom the whole mission depends; a weak parish forms few, leaving its members spiritually undeveloped and ill-equipped for any mission. The quality of a parish's formation directly affects the quality

and number of the apostles it produces, and a man who contributes to the strength of his parish is contributing to its capacity to form apostles, to produce the missionaries the Church needs. This gives a man's investment in his parish a further missional dimension, for in building up his parish he is helping to build the seedbed where the next generation of apostles is formed, contributing to the formation of the very missionaries on whom the future of the mission depends. Strong parishes form apostles, and the man who strengthens his parish strengthens its capacity to produce the formed Christians and committed missionaries that the mission requires.

Your Parish, Your Mission Field

Finally, a man's own parish is itself a mission field, a community in which he can carry out his personal apostolate, witnessing to and serving the many within the parish itself who need to be reached, formed, or drawn deeper into the faith. A parish is full of people at every stage of faith, the lukewarm, the struggling, the searching, the newly arrived, the discouraged, and the man who is active in his parish has countless opportunities to witness to and serve these, to carry out his personal apostolate within the parish community itself. His fellow parishioners are part of his mission field, people he can encourage, welcome, form, and draw deeper into the faith, and his active engagement in the parish gives him access to this field and opportunities to serve it. This means that contributing to one's parish is itself a form of personal mission, an exercising of one's apostolate within the parish community, reaching and serving the many within it who need what one has to give. A man's parish is thus not only a base for the mission to the world but a mission field in its own right, full of people he can serve and reach, and his active contribution to it is itself an exercise of his apostolate. Your parish is your mission field, and in serving it you are not turning away from the mission but carrying it out among the people closest at hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Difference One Man Makes

Why Your Commitment Matters

A man might doubt whether his own commitment to his parish really matters, whether one man's shift from consumer to contributor makes any real difference amid the many. But it does, for parishes are transformed by committed members one at a time, and the difference a single committed man makes is far greater than he imagines. Understanding the real difference one man's commitment makes is the final encouragement to make the

shift this book calls for, for a man who sees that his commitment genuinely matters is far more likely to make it.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. — Colossians 3:23

Parishes Change One Member at a Time

Parishes are not transformed by programs or initiatives alone but by committed members, one at a time, each one who shifts from consumer to contributor strengthening the whole and helping to change the culture of the parish. A parish full of consumers is weak, but every member who becomes a contributor shifts the balance, adding strength and helping to create a culture of contribution that can spread to others, so that the transformation of a parish happens through the accumulation of committed members, one by one. This means that a single man's shift from consumer to contributor is not insignificant but a real contribution to the transformation of his parish, one more committed member strengthening the whole and helping to turn the tide. And the example of a committed member can be contagious, inspiring others to make the same shift, so that one man's commitment can help spark a wider change. Parishes change one member at a time, and a man's own shift from consumer to contributor is a real part of that change, strengthening his parish and potentially inspiring others, so that his single commitment genuinely matters to the transformation of the whole. The difference one man makes is real, for parishes are built by committed members one at a time, and each one counts.

You May Be the One Who Is Needed

A man should consider that he himself may be exactly the committed member his parish needs, the one whose contribution, example, or particular gift is precisely what is lacking, so that his shift from consumer to contributor may meet a real and specific need. Every parish has needs that are going unmet for want of someone to meet them, gaps that a committed member could fill, works that are not being done because no one has stepped forward, and a man may well be the one who is needed, whose contribution would meet a real need, whose gifts are exactly what is lacking. Rather than assuming that others will do what is needed, a man does well to consider that he himself may be the one called to step forward, to fill the gap, to be the committed member his parish lacks, for the works that go undone in a parish go undone precisely because people assume someone else will do them. The man who stops assuming someone else will do it and considers that he himself may be the one needed is often exactly right, and his stepping forward meets a real need that was going unmet. You may be the one who is needed, and the recognition

that your particular contribution may be exactly what your parish lacks is a powerful motive to make the shift and step forward.

For the Lord, Not for Men

Finally, a man's commitment to his parish, and all his contribution to it, is to be made ultimately for the Lord rather than for human recognition, offered as service to God whether or not it is noticed or appreciated by men, and this both purifies the contribution and sustains it. Much contribution to a parish goes unrecognized and unappreciated, and the man who contributes for the sake of human recognition will be disappointed and will not persevere; but the man who contributes for the Lord, offering his service to God, is freed from dependence on human appreciation and can persevere whether or not his contribution is noticed. This also purifies his contribution, keeping it from becoming a search for recognition or position and making it a genuine offering to God, service rendered to the Lord in the person of his Church. The man who contributes to his parish for the Lord rather than for men both offers a purer service and sustains it through the lack of recognition that much parish service involves, finding his reward not in human appreciation but in having served God. To contribute for the Lord and not for men is the right spirit of all parish service, purifying it of the search for recognition and sustaining it through the obscurity that much of it involves, so that a man's commitment to his parish becomes a genuine and persevering offering to God, made whether or not anyone notices, for the Lord in whose Church he serves.

CONCLUSION

Give More Than You Get

The question that reveals how a man relates to his parish is whether he goes mainly to get or to give, and this book has called for the shift from the one to the other, from consumer to asset, from taker to giver. We have seen the consumer mentality that governs most Catholics' relationship to their parish and the harm it does; recovered what the parish actually is, a family, a body, and a community of mission rather than a service provider; traced the fundamental shift from consumer to contributor; considered the concrete ways a man gives to his parish; faced the reality of the imperfect parish and the call to love and serve it anyway; seen that strong parishes are central to the mission; and recognized the real difference one committed man makes.

The shift this book calls for is finally simple to state, however demanding to live: to stop coming to one's parish mainly to get and to start coming mainly to give, to become an

asset to its mission rather than a consumer of its services, a contributing member of a family rather than a customer evaluating a product. This shift transforms a man's parish, which gains a committed member, and transforms the man himself, who gains the belonging and satisfaction that only contribution can give, and it is a real contribution to the health of the Church and the strength of the mission.

So give more than you get. Stop evaluating your parish as a service provider and start serving it as a member of a family; offer your time, your gifts, your presence, and your prayer; love and serve your parish through its imperfections, being part of the solution rather than merely a critic; recognize that strong parishes are the base and seedbed of the whole mission; and know that your own commitment genuinely matters, that you may be exactly the member your parish needs. Make this shift, from consumer to asset, from taker to giver, and you will find that you have strengthened your parish, served the mission, and discovered a belonging and a purpose that all your consuming never gave you, becoming at last not a customer in the pew but a true member of the body, giving yourself for the Lord in the person of his Church.

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