

Be warned. Be prepared. Beware of these causes.

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Why They Leave the Church

The beloved disciple St. John, apostle and evangelist, was noted for his unswerving kindness. One instance of his charity is the story of the young man he met at one of the cities in Asia. Our saint, in delivering a sermon, noticed a young man, fair and attractive, who gave great promise of growing up to be a man worthwhile. St. John had to return to Ephesus. Before leaving he entrusted this young man to the care of the bishop, giving strict charge that the boy should be instructed, trained, and finally baptized and confirmed. All this the bishop did conscientiously.

However, His Excellency later loosened the reins, as it were, and was less watchful over his charge. A group of wicked youths lured our young man into their company. Their talk and their behavior led him away from religion and stifled every sense of sin to the point that he became the head of a band of robbers.

Some time later St. John returned. When he asked the bishop about the young man the latter replied: "He is dead."

"What did he die of?" asked St. John.

"He is dead to God," replied the bishop. *"He has turned a robber, and instead of being in the Church with me, he has gone to a*

mountain where he lives with wicked men like himself."

The holy apostle burst into tears. He called for a horse and guide, and, old as he was, he rode off to find this young man in the mountains. He was taken prisoner by the guards set about the robber camp. He insisted on seeing the robber chief. When our saint met the young man he cried out:

"Son, why do you thus fly from me, your father, unarmed and an old man? There is room for repentance. Your salvation is not impossible. I will answer for you to Jesus Christ."

The young man had taken flight from St. John, but at these words he stopped, thought a moment, threw away his weapons, and burst into tears of sorrow. St. John brought him back to the true fold.

Why do Catholics fall away from the Church in our day?

This is an important question, because every year thousands of Catholics give up the practice of their faith. They leave the true fold. Why? In considering the causes we would like to help those who are out of the Church and who would like to come back, and we want to warn everyone of you to avoid these causes.

1. Proud people leave the Church. They are too proud to bend their wills to the authority of God's Church, too proud to accept the suggestions and corrections of their spiritual shepherds. Once they have left the Church they are too proud to come back.

2. Ignorance causes people to leave the Church, ignorance of the true teachings of the true fold, ignorance of the means needed to stay in the grace and friendship of God. Take stock, everyone of you. You must continue to learn about your religion, even after you have finished the catechism or have made your first Holy Communion. In general, Catholics who stray from the sheepfold do not know the simplest truths of their faith.

3. Another certain cause of leakage is carelessness in attending Sunday Mass. The surest and quickest way to lose your faith is to miss Sunday Mass through your own fault. And the closest step to missing Mass is regularly coming late to the Holy Sacrifice.

4. Materialism makes many leave the Church. They want money, fine clothes, the best cars, social position, the things of this world. They cannot see the value or even the meaning of the spiritual.

5. Mixed marriages drag many out of the fold. Statistics prove that. Beware of them.

6. Bad marriages are another cause, a big one today, with so many divorced people

running around. Find out as soon as you begin to get serious about anyone, whether he or she was married before. Your eternal salvation depends upon it.

7. Indifferentism causes many to fall away. They repeat the senseless, unreasonable and illogical sentence: "One religion is just as good as any other." Logic proves that false. Each religion teaches something different. All can't be right. This shallow idea that it does not make any difference what you believe, has led some to leave the Church. Ours is not the easiest religion to live. These lost sheep choose an easier one. Generally the Catholic who falls away does not join any other church. He goes to no church.

8. Still another reason for lost sheep is bad company. We see that in the story about St. John and the splendid young man who was led into a wicked life by sinful companions. How happy was St. John and how happy were the angels in heaven when the young sheep who was lost was brought back to the fold.

You might be able to add another reason or two to these causes for the loss of sheep from the true Church. Should you know of anyone who has wandered away, no matter how hardened and hopeless his case may seem, invite that individual to come back in. And you who are still in the bosom of Mother Church, consider carefully the causes I have outlined, the reasons we have lost sheep - pride, ignorance, missing Mass, materialism, mixed marriages, bad marriages, indifferentism, and bad company.