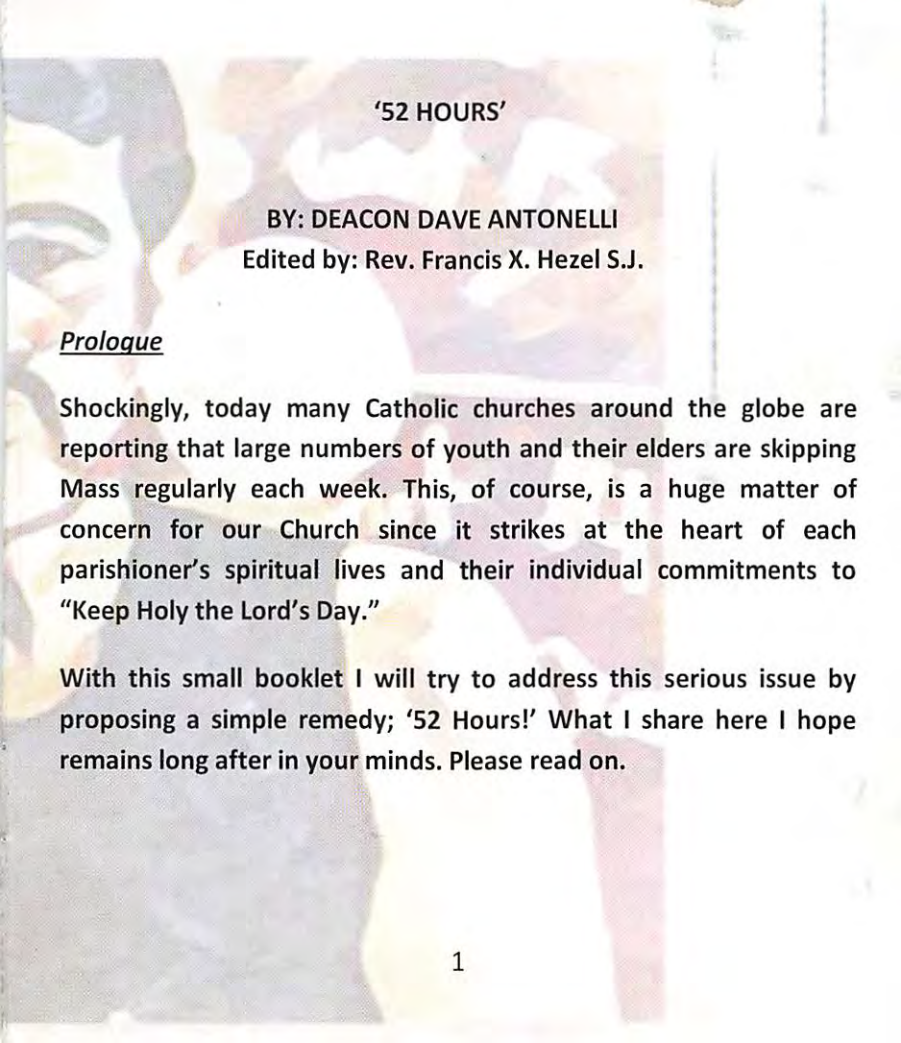


"52" Hours

BY: DEACON DAVE ANTONELLI

Please help pass the word!...

Dave Antonelli



'52 HOURS'

BY: DEACON DAVE ANTONELLI

Edited by: Rev. Francis X. Hezel S.J.

Prologue

Shockingly, today many Catholic churches around the globe are reporting that large numbers of youth and their elders are skipping Mass regularly each week. This, of course, is a huge matter of concern for our Church since it strikes at the heart of each parishioner's spiritual lives and their individual commitments to "Keep Holy the Lord's Day."

With this small booklet I will try to address this serious issue by proposing a simple remedy; '52 Hours!' What I share here I hope remains long after in your minds. Please read on.



Brief History

For over 40 years now, I have lived a committed religious life—first as a Jesuit Volunteer, then a Jesuit brother, and more recently as an ordained deacon. Sad to say, I too have noticed in most recent years the increasing number of empty pews in our Catholic parishes. Most notably absent seem to be the youth. When I point out this phenomenon and discuss it with families, the usual response is that it is common for young people to go on long absences from their church and faith lives as they grow into adults. Even if this is true, history demonstrates this attitude should not be considered the norm and passed over silently. After all, youth living outside their faith have proven to be more likely to suffer the consequences of teen pregnancy and alcohol or drug addiction, among other problems.

A strong faith life is the weapon all people need, at every age, to face the many challenges of our secular world. This is especially true today when bullying, crime, sex scandals, and corruption of all sorts

weigh heavy in the news media. So, in recent years I have taken it upon myself to attempt to find a simple way (52 Hours), to help re-gather our own youth, along with others who have scattered, before things gets worse. On my knees daily, I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me in this endeavor.

Points to Ponder

“Keep Holy the Lord’s Day!”

For most Catholics today, this simply means to attend Mass on the weekend. And so, in truth, this is the easiest commandment that God gave us, yet statistics show that it is the one we break most frequently. While this commandment is crucial to our own personal salvation, no more than 23 percent of all baptized Catholics in the United States and its territories attend mass regularly each week according to a General Social Survey poll done in 2012. I think we would all agree that this needs to change.

What I Propose To Begin With: A simple “52 Hours” only approach!

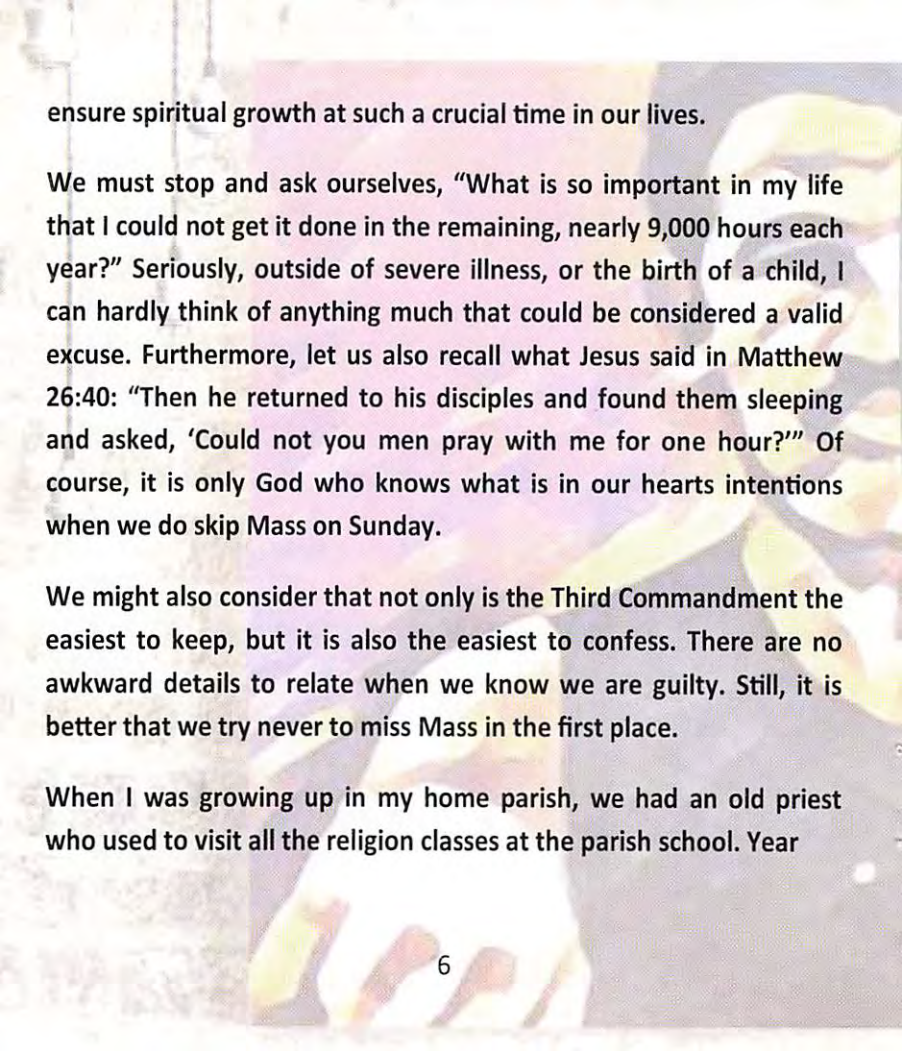
Many of the students I surveyed in the last ten years in over fifty schools could only give weak reasons for skipping Mass on weekends. I will list them later here below. Of the thousands of young people I surveyed, the great majority, about 75 percent, were skipping mass regularly. This number is consistent with the General Social Survey poll referred to above. Let us be reminded here that we are taught in our Catechism of the Catholic Church (2180-2182) that “under grave obligation”; the faithful are bound to attend Mass unless excused for a serious reason (e.g. illness, care of infants) or dispensed by their pastor.

I tell the students no one is trying to scare them, but that our church’s main concern is that we each understand we have souls, and that we need to take care of our souls. We can never expect our church to tell someone they are damned, but the church would just have us know a soul is damnable. We need to live faithful lives if we wish to be counted among the faithful. By Sunday participation the

faithful witness to their belonging to the church, to their communion in love, and to their hope of salvation.

As a side note, many of the faithful may not be aware of the fact that, should they have a valid reason for missing weekend Mass, the parish in which they are a member is responsible for sending a priest, deacon, or minister of the Eucharist to their home so that they can hear the Word read and receive the Eucharist there as well. All that is required is a phone call. This just reinforces how important our weekly Mass commitment is for our spiritual lives.

As mentioned above, attending Mass each week is the easiest Commandment to keep. Here's why—and readers should really pay attention here. Because there are only 52 Sundays in a year, and the Mass is usually finished in just an hour. This means we are really only required to spend about 52 hours a year to observe this commandment. When we continue to do the math (365 days x 24 hours), and discover there are nearly 9,000 hours in a year, it becomes surprisingly clear how little is actually expected of us to



ensure spiritual growth at such a crucial time in our lives.

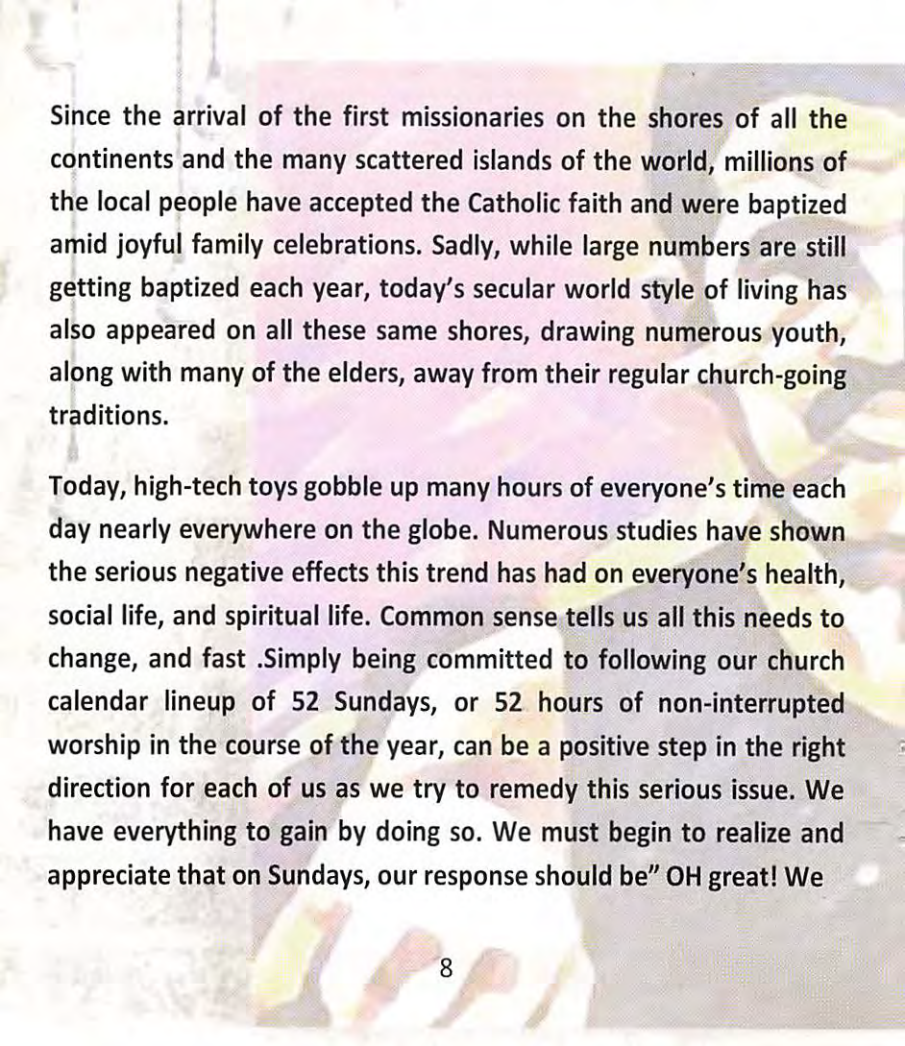
We must stop and ask ourselves, “What is so important in my life that I could not get it done in the remaining, nearly 9,000 hours each year?” Seriously, outside of severe illness, or the birth of a child, I can hardly think of anything much that could be considered a valid excuse. Furthermore, let us also recall what Jesus said in Matthew 26:40: “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping and asked, ‘Could not you men pray with me for one hour?’” Of course, it is only God who knows what is in our hearts intentions when we do skip Mass on Sunday.

We might also consider that not only is the Third Commandment the easiest to keep, but it is also the easiest to confess. There are no awkward details to relate when we know we are guilty. Still, it is better that we try never to miss Mass in the first place.

When I was growing up in my home parish, we had an old priest who used to visit all the religion classes at the parish school. Year

after year, he would always ask us the same question, "What is the purpose of life?" I remember his main message to us was this: the purpose of life is to get ready to stay dead a long time!" 😊 He made us laugh, but we all understood his point was actually so true. His message just reinforced for us the importance that our weekly Mass had in preparing us for something beyond, and that we could never take it for granted.

Some experts today suggest we do not try to force our youth to go to church each week. They claim that, at that age, our attempts to force them with moral codes and tradition will only drive them further away. They claim that only those who have reached the stage when they feel they have a real relationship with Jesus can truly appreciate the mass. I really believe such experts are only adding to the problem by suggesting this. We read from scripture in a number of places (eg, Deuteronomy 6:7, and Proverbs 22:6) of the importance of teaching children diligently early on, starting them on the right path from which they will not depart.



Since the arrival of the first missionaries on the shores of all the continents and the many scattered islands of the world, millions of the local people have accepted the Catholic faith and were baptized amid joyful family celebrations. Sadly, while large numbers are still getting baptized each year, today's secular world style of living has also appeared on all these same shores, drawing numerous youth, along with many of the elders, away from their regular church-going traditions.

Today, high-tech toys gobble up many hours of everyone's time each day nearly everywhere on the globe. Numerous studies have shown the serious negative effects this trend has had on everyone's health, social life, and spiritual life. Common sense tells us all this needs to change, and fast. Simply being committed to following our church calendar lineup of 52 Sundays, or 52 hours of non-interrupted worship in the course of the year, can be a positive step in the right direction for each of us as we try to remedy this serious issue. We have everything to gain by doing so. We must begin to realize and appreciate that on Sundays, our response should be "OH great! We

get to go to Mass,” rather than “Oh heck! We have to go to Mass.”

We all have a role in professing our faith and addressing this issue. As a start, we might simply live our faith as an example to others, as we so often did in the past when each week we gathered our families together on the Lord’s Day for Mass. If we are far from our families, then we can still set a good example as an individual by getting ourselves to service each week without failure. There we may build a community of new ‘Friends in the Lord’ who will want us to be with them each week while we are living in the parish. Furthermore, as we rise up to the expectation of promoting our faith, we can constantly remind our fellow Catholics that we are here to change the world rather than allowing it to change us.

Section One: *If I can do it, so can you!*

The following pattern of addressing each class I have created as a teaching tool that can be used with adult groups as well. I highly recommend it to those willing to take up the ministry of “helping

people get back in the pews where they belong.”

Monday Mornings

Preferably, you will meet with your target group on a Monday morning. Then, immediately after a short ice-breaker to get the class in a good mood, I ask all the students—or whoever is in attendance—to rise from their seats. In a clear voice I tell them to be completely honest and sit down if they did not attend Mass this past weekend. It is a great visual for all those gathered there to witness first hand, as they see for themselves just who among them is actually making the effort to ‘Honor the Lord’s Day.’

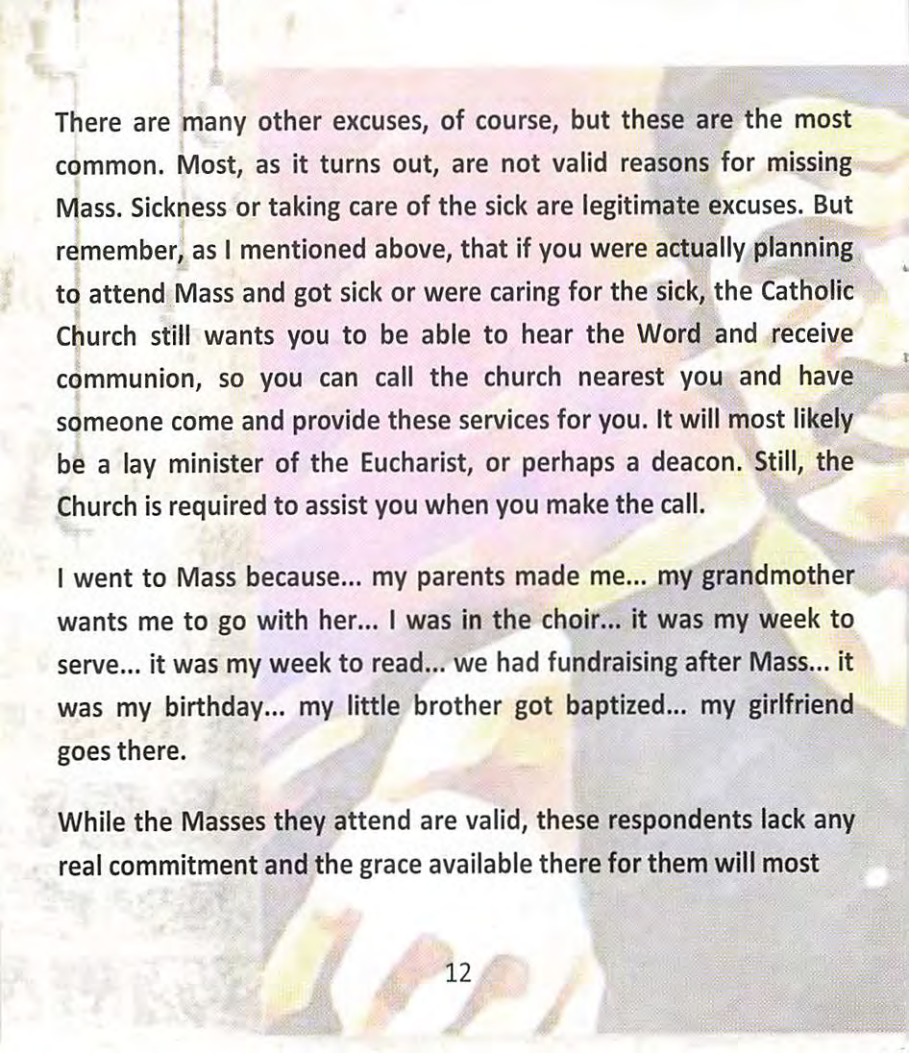
At this point, a great class can be had having those who sat down explaining why they missed, then having those who remain standing share with the class why they attended. Tabs could be kept on the board for all to see as well, or in a notebook for later reference. I recommend this method to help get all the students involved in some feedback, while also giving them time to think about any

serious questions they may have on this crucial topic.

Section Two: *Most common responses for missing or attending Mass*

As I promised early on in this booklet, I will list the most common responses I have heard over the years from both sides. Perhaps you may find yourself somewhere in the chorus here.

I skipped Mass because... I had a party-hardy weekend so I overslept... it was raining... too far, no transportation... no priest doing the mass, just the deacon... I don't like the priest doing the mass... it's not in my language... I had no money for the collection... I had no good clothes to wear... I had a basketball game... I had to work... went fishing... we had a school Mass on Friday just a couple days before... I overslept after watching TV all night... no one in my family goes... I went golfing... I only go if I serve mass or if I am in the choir or if I do a reading or if I have been assigned something... I skip because it is too boring... I never get to confession first... I was sick in the morning, but I did go out playing later in the day.



There are many other excuses, of course, but these are the most common. Most, as it turns out, are not valid reasons for missing Mass. Sickness or taking care of the sick are legitimate excuses. But remember, as I mentioned above, that if you were actually planning to attend Mass and got sick or were caring for the sick, the Catholic Church still wants you to be able to hear the Word and receive communion, so you can call the church nearest you and have someone come and provide these services for you. It will most likely be a lay minister of the Eucharist, or perhaps a deacon. Still, the Church is required to assist you when you make the call.

I went to Mass because... my parents made me... my grandmother wants me to go with her... I was in the choir... it was my week to serve... it was my week to read... we had fundraising after Mass... it was my birthday... my little brother got baptized... my girlfriend goes there.

While the Masses they attend are valid, these respondents lack any real commitment and the grace available there for them will most

likely flow in less abundance. Again, only the Lord will judge, but I must say these types of responses are really disheartening for me to listen to. Sadly, it is rare to hear a youth say something like, "I go every week because I love the Lord," or "I love the Eucharist," or "I want to receive Holy Communion," or "I want to join religious life," or "I feel it is my obligation to keep His day holy," or "The Mass is at the core of my faith," or "It is the Mass that helps me get through each week." But, we must never lose hope! I share all these above quotes with my classes, urging them to add to the discussion or otherwise get involved in it.

The chief aim of this booklet, then, is to be thought-provoking in reinforcing Our Lord's Third Commandment in the form of weekly mass attendance and in rekindling love for the Eucharist. It is a large task to accomplish in this age of overwhelming distractions like never before, and indeed a hard time to be a youth trying to grow up faithful in the Christian tradition. The old saying has never been truer: "It takes a village to raise a child."

Sadly, I see our secular society is having great success in teaching our little ones to be vulgar in their language use, in adding insulting finger gestures that only end up causing more bad feelings and division. We concerned Christians must gain success in solidifying their spiritual lives early on to help them fend off these common daily attacks from the dark side.

Again, this booklet's simple theme is preaching it only takes "52 Hours" out of 9,000 each year to get started in strengthening our faith. This is a simple but important step for enabling us to deal with the darkness in us and around us. To gather all those who are scattered back in our pews will help keep us on the one path that leads to the light we all seek. Stand up and be counted next Monday morning as one who dared not skip Mass on the weekend. 😊

In Conclusion

Right now the clock is still ticking. These 52 short hours mentioned here still have a great importance in determining where we will be,

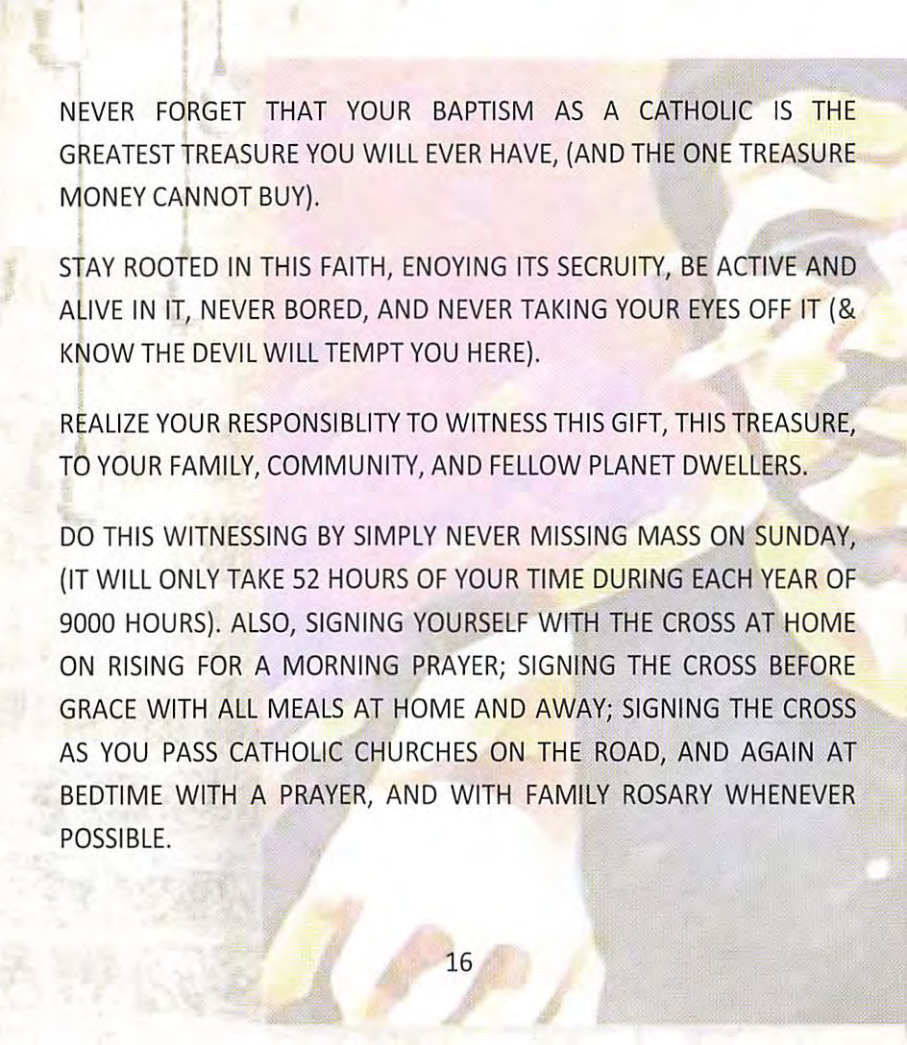
perhaps 50 or 100 years from now, where clocks cease to exist. Now is the time to make proper use of our hours here while they still count.

May God continue to bless us all in this colossal but achievable endeavor.

Bonus Section:

'Ways to live and remain faithful in a secular world.'

Consider this; it is simple, and everyone likes simple: Jesus Christ's Resurrection is the most wicked, vicious, heart-less, fake, hoaxes ever passed on to the minds of men and women hands down!!!, OR , it is the most fantastic fact of human history!!! If you believe he was a fake...you are done reading here; If you believe He is God the Son, and that all He said is true, you can read on here reminding us of what we can and should do as baptized Christians in this faith.

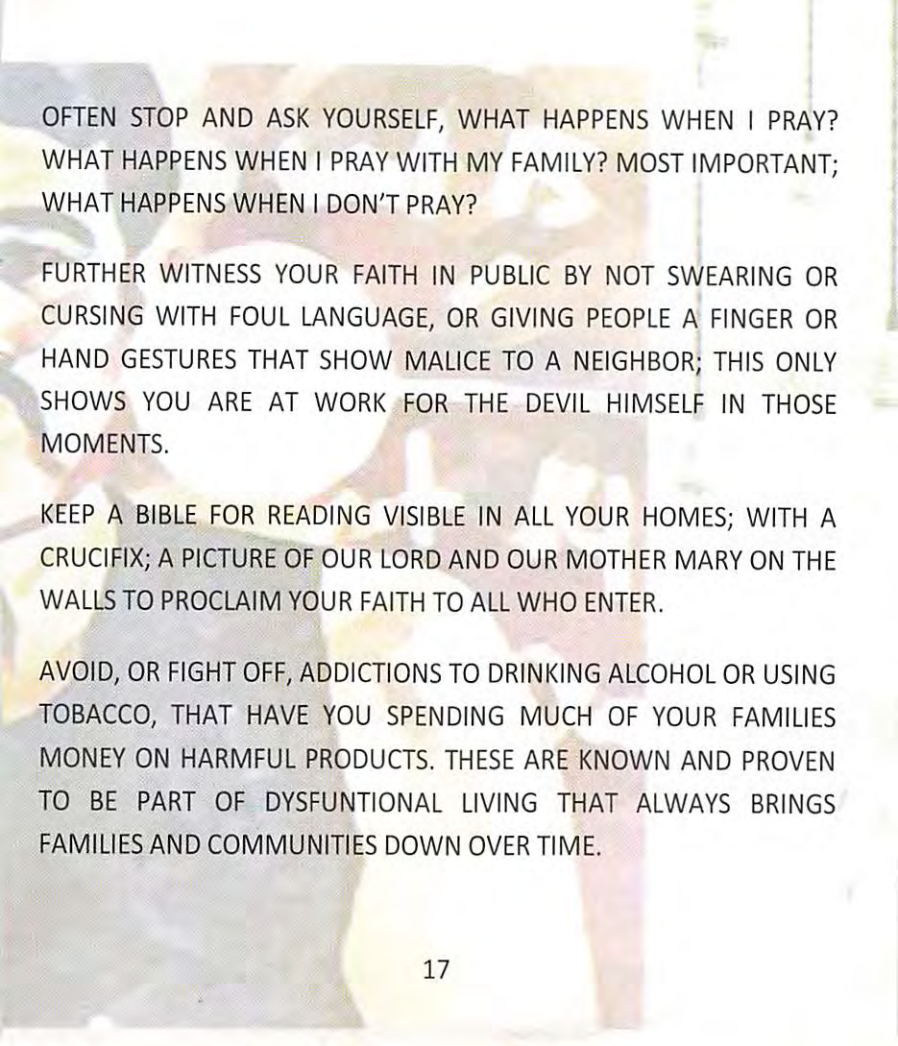


NEVER FORGET THAT YOUR BAPTISM AS A CATHOLIC IS THE GREATEST TREASURE YOU WILL EVER HAVE, (AND THE ONE TREASURE MONEY CANNOT BUY).

STAY ROOTED IN THIS FAITH, ENJOYING ITS SECURITY, BE ACTIVE AND ALIVE IN IT, NEVER BORED, AND NEVER TAKING YOUR EYES OFF IT (& KNOW THE DEVIL WILL TEMPT YOU HERE).

REALIZE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO WITNESS THIS GIFT, THIS TREASURE, TO YOUR FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND FELLOW PLANET DWELLERS.

DO THIS WITNESSING BY SIMPLY NEVER MISSING MASS ON SUNDAY, (IT WILL ONLY TAKE 52 HOURS OF YOUR TIME DURING EACH YEAR OF 9000 HOURS). ALSO, SIGNING YOURSELF WITH THE CROSS AT HOME ON RISING FOR A MORNING PRAYER; SIGNING THE CROSS BEFORE GRACE WITH ALL MEALS AT HOME AND AWAY; SIGNING THE CROSS AS YOU PASS CATHOLIC CHURCHES ON THE ROAD, AND AGAIN AT BEDTIME WITH A PRAYER, AND WITH FAMILY ROSARY WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

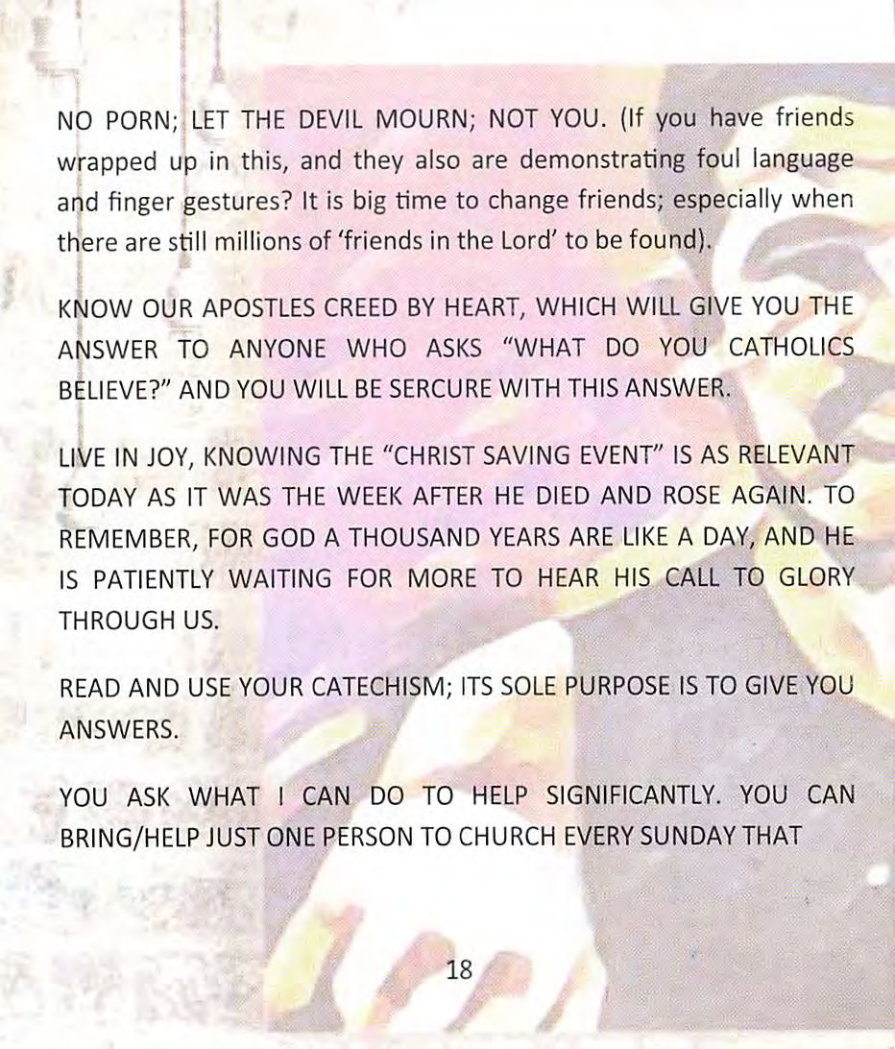


OFTEN STOP AND ASK YOURSELF, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I PRAY?
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I PRAY WITH MY FAMILY? MOST IMPORTANT;
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I DON'T PRAY?

FURTHER WITNESS YOUR FAITH IN PUBLIC BY NOT SWEARING OR CURSING WITH FOUL LANGUAGE, OR GIVING PEOPLE A FINGER OR HAND GESTURES THAT SHOW MALICE TO A NEIGHBOR; THIS ONLY SHOWS YOU ARE AT WORK FOR THE DEVIL HIMSELF IN THOSE MOMENTS.

KEEP A BIBLE FOR READING VISIBLE IN ALL YOUR HOMES; WITH A CRUCIFIX; A PICTURE OF OUR LORD AND OUR MOTHER MARY ON THE WALLS TO PROCLAIM YOUR FAITH TO ALL WHO ENTER.

AVOID, OR FIGHT OFF, ADDICTIONS TO DRINKING ALCOHOL OR USING TOBACCO, THAT HAVE YOU SPENDING MUCH OF YOUR FAMILIES MONEY ON HARMFUL PRODUCTS. THESE ARE KNOWN AND PROVEN TO BE PART OF DYSFUNCTIONAL LIVING THAT ALWAYS BRINGS FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES DOWN OVER TIME.



NO PORN; LET THE DEVIL MOURN; NOT YOU. (If you have friends wrapped up in this, and they also are demonstrating foul language and finger gestures? It is big time to change friends; especially when there are still millions of 'friends in the Lord' to be found).

KNOW OUR APOSTLES CREED BY HEART, WHICH WILL GIVE YOU THE ANSWER TO ANYONE WHO ASKS "WHAT DO YOU CATHOLICS BELIEVE?" AND YOU WILL BE SECURE WITH THIS ANSWER.

LIVE IN JOY, KNOWING THE "CHRIST SAVING EVENT" IS AS RELEVANT TODAY AS IT WAS THE WEEK AFTER HE DIED AND ROSE AGAIN. TO REMEMBER, FOR GOD A THOUSAND YEARS ARE LIKE A DAY, AND HE IS PATIENTLY WAITING FOR MORE TO HEAR HIS CALL TO GLORY THROUGH US.

READ AND USE YOUR CATECHISM; ITS SOLE PURPOSE IS TO GIVE YOU ANSWERS.

YOU ASK WHAT I CAN DO TO HELP SIGNIFICANTLY. YOU CAN BRING/HELP JUST ONE PERSON TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY THAT

YOU KNOW IS CATHOLIC BUT LACKS SUPPORT IN GOING TO MASS. (AND KNOW THIS SMALL ACT ALONE IS HUGE IN VALUE FOR YOUR EXTERNAL LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN).

UNDERSTAND THAT IT IS NOT ONLY THE PARENTS RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP GET THEIR KIDS INTO HEAVEN, BUT EACH ONE OF US RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP EACH OTHER GET THERE.

ENDURE WITH HIGHEST HOPE, (ESPECIALLY THE TIMES WHEN GOD IS SILENT, OR GONE MISSING IT SEEMS); KNOW HE HAS HIS REASONS THAT WILL BE MANIFESTED TO US EACH IN HIS TIME.

GOD KNOWS EVERYONE'S LIFE SITUATION IS DIFFERENT AND HE WILL NOT JUDGE US AS IF WE HAD NO DIFFICULTIES. WHAT MATTERS IS THE SINCERITY AND GENUINE PERSERVERANCE HE SEES IN EACH OF US AND THE FRUITS WE SOUGHT TO BEAR WITH OTHERS.

AND ALWAYS FEEL FREE TO SHOUT FROM THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN THAT, "THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A SAD CHRISTIAN!" ALL DUE TO THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIAN JOY GROUNDED IN CHRIST, WITH HOPE AND HAPPINESS THAT PREVAILS DESPITE DIFFICULT TIMES. 😊

Final Point To Ponder:

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER THIS AND WORK ON IT:DO I ATTEND MASS WITHOUT PARTICIPATING? OR PARTICIPATE WITHOUT BELIEVING? OR BELIEVE WITHOUT EMBRACING?OR DO I EMBRACE AND FULLY BELIEVE? 😊

AND FINALLY, EXPECT TO FIND YOURSELF TO BE RESTLESS IN THE LORD, UNTIL YOU REST IN HIM.

(GUARANTEED YOU WILL FIND NO GREATER FULFILLMENT IN ANY OTHER ENDEAVOR LIFE OFFERS; SEE YOU IN CHURCH THIS WEEK)²

Because if we only go sometimes, we are setting ourselves up to fail.

About The Author



Deacon Dave Antonelli received his initial Catholic education at Parochial schools in the San Francisco Bay Area where he grew up as a pre-Vatican II altar boy. After High school he served four years in the Navy, Marine, and Army as a medical corpsman during the Vietnam War era. On return he entered the Peace Corps for two years as a Field Dispensary Medic for the islands of Micronesia. After Peace Corps he joined the Jesuits of Micronesia Missionaries, teaching health and doing dispensary work at their numerous mission schools there. During that time he was able to earn a Liberal Arts Degree, as the only American to date to graduate, from the College of Micronesia. He later transferred to the University of Guam to earn a degree in Physical Ed.; where he taught one semester of P.E. after graduation, before returning to Micronesia to work as a Jesuit Brother in the health field for another twenty years. More recently he joined the Diocesan Order and studied theology (also as the first American to do so), at the Pacific Regional Seminary in Fiji. On completion of his studies there, he was ordained a Deacon under the Bishop of the Caroline Islands. He is a retired deacon now living on Guam and working heavy in youth ministry as a motivational speaker. He is also skilled in juggling and magic which has been a great drawing card in his work with youth. (Feel free to friend him on Facebook...just message him you read this on your request).

Growing up in my home parish, there was an old priest who used to visit all the religion classes at the school there. Year after year, he would always ask us the same question, "What is the purpose of life?" I remember his main message to us was that, "The Purpose of life is to get ready to stay dead a long time!" He made us laugh, but we all understood his point was actually so true. For us, his message just reinforced for us that our weekly Mass played a huge role in our preparation, and that we could never take it for granted.

This little booklet is also designed to help aid you in your preparation even more. Read on!