



Boston Catholic Journal

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A Breached Garden Wall: When *Premises* Replace *Promises* ...

"God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and *the love you have demonstrated for His Name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones*. We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises." (Hebrews 6:10-12)



"... the love you have demonstrated for His Name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones."

Think of it. We demonstrate our love for God by serving His holy ones. What is more, we are encouraged to be imitators of them.

Let's sort this out a bit.

Who are His "holy ones"?

It is vital for us to know, for we, who are to serve them, are to be imitators of them! Who, then, are they?

It is a sad indictment of us that today we do not immediately know the answer. Is it not true that as you had read the question just put to you, you yourselves were uncertain; you had questioned yourself, unclear of who, precisely, these "holy ones" are.

Our parents would have lingered less on the question, and our grandparents would not have hesitated at all. They knew.

His "Holy Ones" are just whom you suspect them to be ... but have been taught to dismiss. They are our Priests, our Consecrated and Cloistered Nuns, our Friars and Monks, our recognizable Sisters. These are God's holy ones ... "*set apart*", as the word "holy" etymologically indicates, an etymology which also implies "*that [which] must be preserved whole or intact, that [which] cannot be transgressed or violated,*" *

As our Church here in America and elsewhere moves toward redefining itself in terms of an intensely egalitarian and democratic mission, the notion of "being set apart" has become more and more marginalized. As the distinction between Lay and Religious becomes increasingly permeable, each assuming the role of the other, it becomes increasingly meaningless. Our priests and nuns, seemingly humiliated by their association with Jesus Christ and contemptuous of their own vocation, attempt to become more and more Lay, secular, indistinguishable, "less set apart" from the laity, while certain of the more "progressive" laity, astutely observing the obvious vacuum crying to be filled, clamor to fill the void the Religious have left and eagerly become "Ministers of this and that" ... in other words, to be "set apart". The reversal of roles would be comical were it not tragic.

This emerging "Egalitarian Church" is one in which God has no favorites, there are no sinners, and therefore there are no Saints. All are on a level playing field, including God Himself. The concept of "set apart" becomes repugnant to its democratic instincts, and so it abolishes all that is "set apart", which is to say, it abolishes the "holy".

It trades sanctity for democracy.

The problem, however, is that the Church is not a democracy, but a Theocracy: hierarchical from God to the Angels to the Saints to the Sinners. Each has their place. Some are immutable, unchangeable. Men cannot become Angels. They cannot hold a plebiscite and vote themselves Angelic. There is an ontic distinction, a distinction in nature that is not susceptible to democratic change. Some are less so: sinners can become Saints. Men can become Priests. Women can become Nuns. The fact of the matter remains nevertheless clear: it is not a democracy devoid of distinctions. Men are not women, and women are not angels and Seraphim are not Cherubim, and theologians are not God, and for a few notable exceptions, men and women are not demons. *All* are set apart. Theologically, it is what we understand as the "Divine Economy".

But not all are set apart by God and for God

Even among those chosen, the thistle grows with the grain – and even threatens to choke the Garden altogether. How few worthy Priests and Nuns we find today. How few are faithful to and

zealous of their vocations. Finding the garment of holiness ill-fitting and not at all to their liking, they toss it aside and adorn themselves as the world. They cease being "set apart" – but keep the titles for the prerogatives. "Priests" in tweed jackets and no collars, "Sisters" in Wall Street Suits, whole Communities indistinguishable from the stylish world around them. It is condign. For they are no longer "set apart". It is, in a word, logical: the ineluctable conclusion to premises that have replaced promises.

Nevertheless – some remain. They will always remain. A fragment. A remnant of the beautifully embroidered train of the King that has been dragged through the mud. By and large, you will know them when you see them. They will look like the "holy ones" we have known, our parents had known, our ancestors had known, for 2000 years.

They do not look like the world because they are not of the world. Ever faithful to their Spouse, they have held to His Word ... *they are not of the world.* And for this, the world – especially their own more "progressive" counterparts – hate them. It must be so. *"If they hate you, remember that they hated me first"* (St. John 15.18)

These are the "Holy Ones". It is these, serving *us*, whom we ourselves are called to serve, for in serving them, we serve God. Serve the Spouse, and you serve Him to Whom they are Espoused.

And all the willing and voting, the "Federations", and social devices of women and men cannot make it otherwise. God Himself has willed it, and it is He Himself Who sets them "apart" ... for Himself ... and, ultimately, through their holy lives and prayers, for *our* sake.

This vexes us. Even angers us. It is the same malice that Cain knew when He saw God's predilection, His special love for Abel. And our solution, the solution of the "Egalitarian Church", is effectively the same as Cain's response to God's special love for Abel: kill the beloved, abolish it, outlaw it, extinguish it. All must be acceptable and equal in God's sight. None set apart. None "special". It offends us. It is not ... "correct".

This was also the response of Jacob's 11 sons to Israel's predilection for Joseph.

It was so from the beginning.

It remains so now.

How, then, serve His "holy ones" who serve *you* day and night, in sleepless vigils, foodless days, in real poverty and prayer?

Sow the Garden! There is none more beautiful this side of Heaven. And you know it. Your children, your sons, your daughters, your friends, those you love most ... those most dear to you ... send them! *To the Garden!* God's Garden. The place He has "set apart", for those whom He has "set apart" to be holy ... even as He is Holy.

Are these the *only* "holy ones"? No. Of course not. But they are the most conspicuous.

There are children, too.

And even some adults ... who have become like unto them.



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