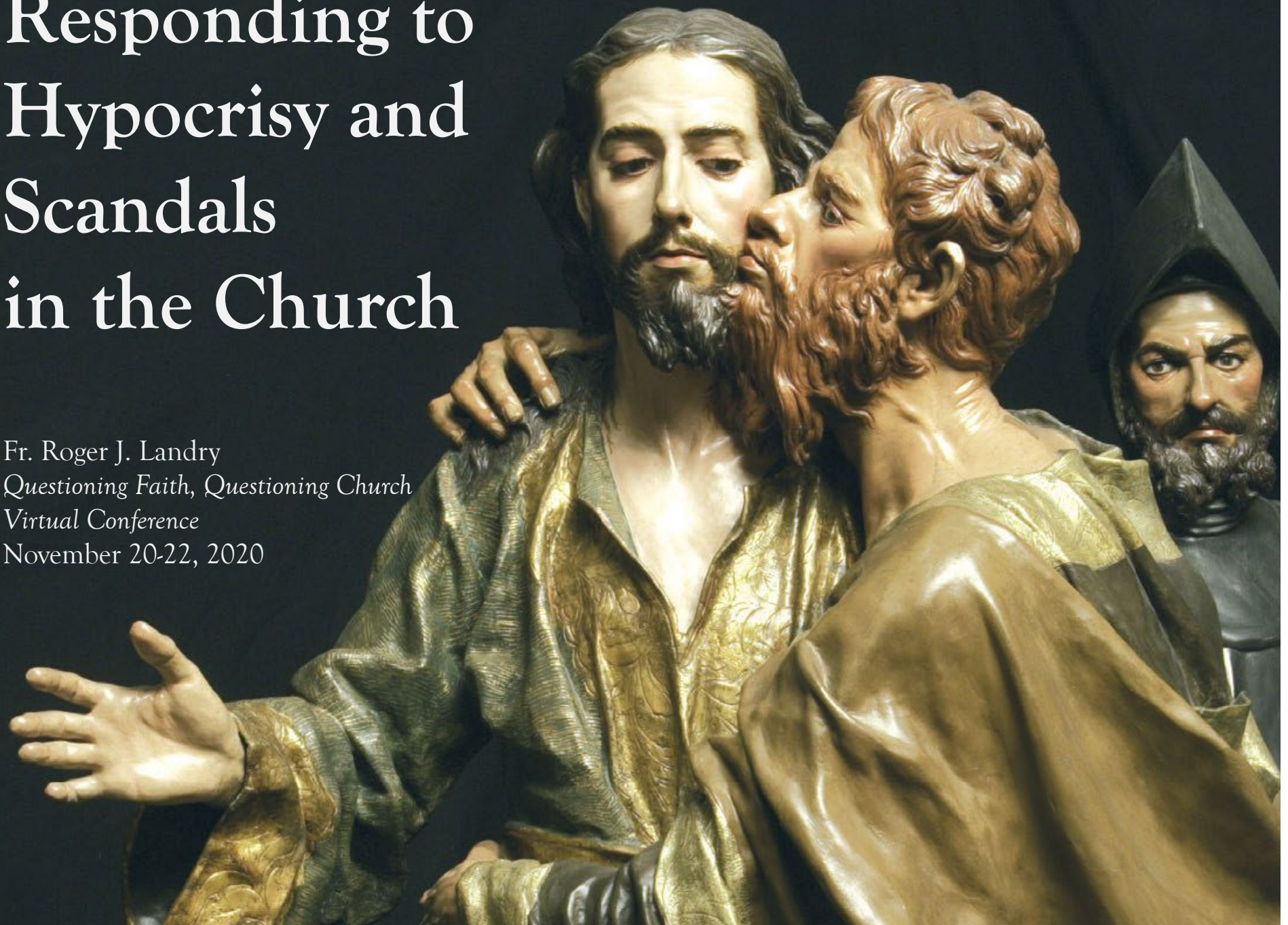


Responding to Hypocrisy and Scandals in the Church

Fr. Roger J. Landry
Questioning Faith, Questioning Church
Virtual Conference
November 20-22, 2020



The Problem of Hypocrisy and Scandal



- “Taken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion” (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 19, 1965).
- It is good and legitimate to hold Christians to a high standard. They’re called to believe what Jesus taught and put it into practice. They are called to love others as Christ (God) loved them first.
 - They’re supposed to forgive.
 - They’re supposed to keep the Commandments, to honor parents, not to hate or take life, or lie, or steal, or be envious.
 - They’re supposed to live the Beatitudes.
 - They’re supposed to care for the poor, the needy, the littlest.
- When they don’t, they give “scandal,” they become a “stumbling block” for people and often turn them away from the faith.

The Problem of Hypocrisy and Scandal

- Scandal can turn away the “good”
 - A Christian Missionary once asked Mahatma Gandhi, “Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear so adamantly to reject becoming his follower?” Gandhi replied, “Oh, I don’t reject Christ! I love Christ! It’s just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ. If Christians would really live according to the teaching of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today.”
- Scandal can also turn away the “bad”
 - The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who coined the phrase “God is dead and if he weren’t we’d have to kill him,” and whose thoughts were one of the seeds of Nazism, said something far more severe: “I may have been able to believe in a Redeemer, if I had ever met someone redeemed!”
- There’s a built-in contradiction to scandals, a disconnect between what one professes and how one lives.
- We call this hypocrisy. Hypocrite comes from the Greek word for “actor,” someone who wears a mask. With hypocrites, what you see is not what you get. They break down trust. You can’t believe what they say. You can’t follow their example. You basically can’t stand the pretension that they’re good when they’re not.



The Problem of Hypocrisy and Scandal



- This is obviously a problem with the clergy sexual abuse scandals.
- So many priests, who were supposed to lay down their lives for Jesus' people, instead took advantage of them, including children.
- Many bishops, who are supposed to supervise and protect Jesus' flock from the wolves, didn't eliminate the problem but moved them around. Rather than caring for victims, they often stonewalled them or didn't treat them as beloved children of God. Rather than telling the truth, they lied about it, often to protect the Church's assets rather than those for whom Christ died.
- Such filth made it hard for people to believe in the holiness of the Church. It made it hard for them to believe in apostolic succession, the beauty of chaste celibacy, Christ's working through the Sacraments (especially of Confession and the Eucharist), and so much more.

The Problem of Hypocrisy and Scandal

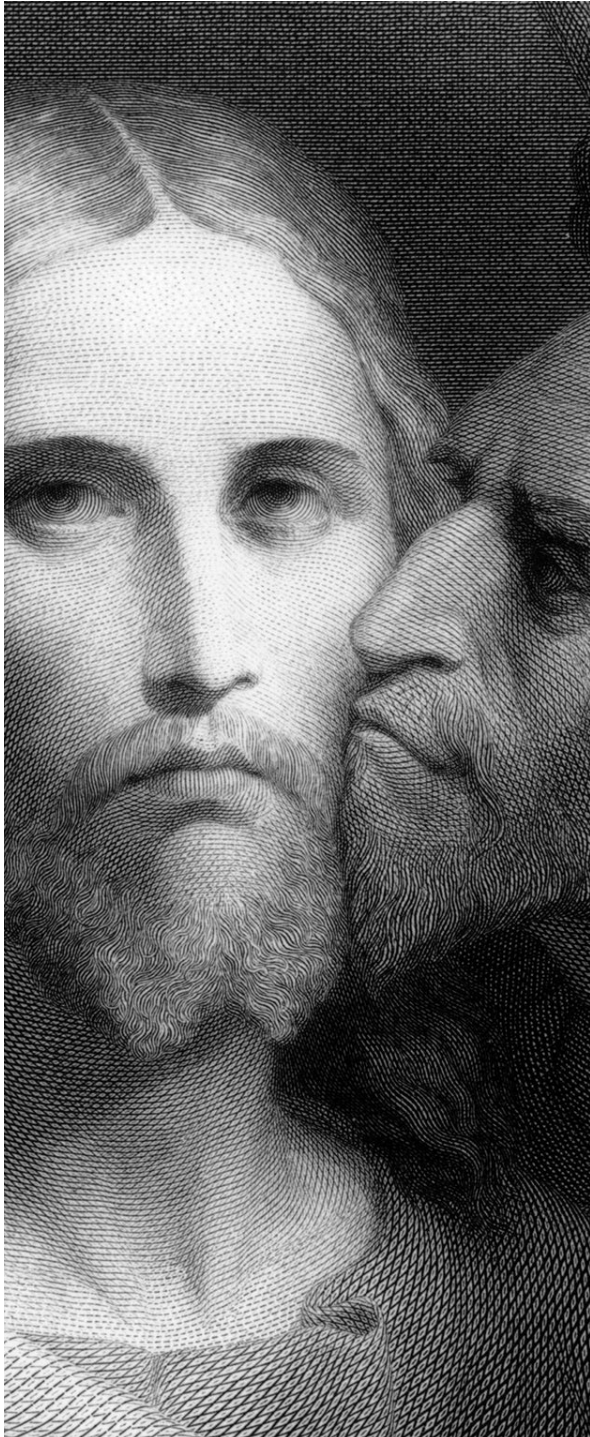
- But there's also a much larger problem with hypocrisy in the Church.
 - Christ calls his followers to holiness and there is so much lack of love for God and others shown in so many ways.
 - How can those to whom Jesus says, "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me," treat the poor, the elderly, the unborn, the broken, the disabled, with hardness of heart rather than love?
 - How can three out of four Catholics not come to Mass when we proclaim that the Mass is Jesus' Body and Blood?
 - How can we prioritize so many things over making time to pray?
 - How can so few Catholics really know Sacred Scripture when we profess that it is the Word of God?
 - How can we delay baptizing babies?
 - How can we not admit we're sinners and come to receive God's mercy in the Sacrament Jesus himself established?
 - How can so many Catholic marriages cavalierly break down and Catholics divorce and remarry even though Jesus – Jesus! – clearly teaches that's adultery?





Jesus and Hypocrisy and Scandal

- Jesus spoke out a lot about hypocrisy
 - “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but not do as I say?”
 - “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.”
 - “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
 - “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”
 - “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”
 - “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’



Jesus and Hypocrisy and Scandal

- Jesus himself suffered from hypocrisy
 - So many were conspiring to kill him. They would come to flatter him, but behind his back, they were plotting against him.
 - We can't forget that he was betrayed by one of his own, Judas, who sold him out with a kiss, an act of love.
 - He knew it was going to happen and announced it: "Surely one of you will betray me."
 - But it didn't stop him, and that is a great lesson.
- Jesus gave parables about the good and the bad in the Church
 - The weeds and the wheat.
 - "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said, ... 'Do you want us to go and pull [the weeds] up?' He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"
 - The dragnet dragging in fish of every kind.
 - "The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age."




Jesus and Hypocrisy and Scandal

- Jesus also spoke out about scandal:
 - “Whoever causes one of these little ones* who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come!”
 - “Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
- The takeaway from this is that Jesus shares hatred for hypocrisy, for duplicity, and for scandal. Why does he permit those who would? Because he hopes for their conversion, like the Good Thief on the Cross, like every sinner who became a saint.
- God told us through the Prophet Ezekiel: “But if the wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live. He shall not die! None of the crimes he has committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the justice he has shown. Do I find pleasure in the death of the wicked—oracle of the Lord God? Do I not rejoice when they turn from their evil way and live?”

What To Do In Response



- Recognize the grace of hatred for scandals and hypocrisy. It is right to be filled with righteous indignation about the sins and crimes of the clergy sex abuse scandals, or about politicians who sell out their faith for votes, or husbands who betray their wives and children to have affairs, and all other evils. But what does this vituperation show? How should we respond?
- The lesson of the Emmaus scene of Jesus and the two disciples
- Recognize that hypocrisy isn't a mark of the Church but of human beings.
- While the Church can and should be held to a higher standard than other institutions, and Christians than other persons, we shouldn't be a hypocrite ourselves in holding the Church to a standard of perfection and other institutions or persons to very low standards. Do we hold other institutions to any standard at all?
- Story of a student at the high school where I was a chaplain who had one standard for guidance counselors at our Catholic school and another for guidance counselors at the big public school across the street when he wasn't able to get out of a math class with a challenging teacher.



What To Do In Response

- Remember the Parable of the Plank and the Speck and the scene of the Woman Caught in Adultery
 - “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove that splinter from your eye,’ while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye.”
 - “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ ... And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.”
 - The take away is that we all are called to live with integrity. Just like we can occasionally fail to live in accordance with what we believe and the principles we profess, so can others. That doesn’t make failures “right” or easily dismissible, but it does prevent our becoming hypocrites in responding more to others’ sins than our own.

What To Do In Response

- Judge the Church (and other institutions) not by those who fail to live by its teachings but by those who do.
 - The Church is more characterized by the 11 apostles who proved faithful than by Judas. The Church is more defined by Teresa of Calcutta than Theodore McCarrick. The Saints are the true face of the Church.
 - Special summons: If believers “can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism ... to the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life” and thereby “conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion,” then they can have more than a little to do with the birth of faith through setting good example.
 - For believers, we try to remember that the Church contains a “treasure” in “earthen vessels.” We can’t focus so much on the flaws in the packaging that we fail to remember the treasure.





Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the gift of your fidelity to us and beg your help so that we and others may always be faithful to you in good times and in bad all the days of life. Help us to love and live in the truth that sets us free. Let your holiness shine in your sons and daughters so that others, in seeing their good deeds, may glorify you.

Give your blessing in a special way to those who have been scandalized by members of the Church your Son founded, those who have been hurt, those who have been turned away. Just like your Son met the scandalized disciples on the road to Emmaus and made their hearts burn, so help the members of the Church enter into the conversations, lives and questions of those who are heading away from Jerusalem in such a way that they might find that the reasons for their departure contain the seeds of their return.

We make this prayer in a special way through the intercession of St. Paul. He was scandalized by the claims that Jesus, whom he believed to be merely a carpenter from Nazareth, was actually your Divine Son, but when Jesus revealed himself to him outside the gates of Damascus as he was persecuting the Church, Paul ceased to be scandalized and began to be one of your Son's greatest apostles. Please send your Son to work similar moral miracles in all those who, in opposing the Church are accidentally opposing Jesus and the mercy, salvation and holiness that you offer them through him. We ask this in your Son's name, who is Lord forever and ever.



Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read,
Teach what you believe,
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts. You may also follow postings of articles, homilies and teachings on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

You can also subscribe to the podcast of daily homilies, lectures and talks through Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,
Fr. Roger J. Landry



Most Recent Homilies

God's Comfort and the Conversion Required to Receive It, Second Sunday of Advent (B), December 6, 2020

Accepting, Following and Announcing Jesus without Offense, Second Sunday of Advent (EF), December 6, 2020

Walking the Way of the Kingdom Jesus Indicates, First Saturday of Advent, December 5, 2020

Running to Meet Our Light, Strength and Salvation, First Friday of Advent, December 4, 2020

Listening to and Acting on the Long Awaited One's Words, First Thursday of Advent, December 3, 2020

Going Hungry to Meet Christ in a Three-Fold Banquet, First Wednesday of Advent, December 2, 2020

Childlike Eyes to See, First Tuesday of Advent, December 1, 2020

Singing the Song of the Lamb, 34th Wednesday (II), November 25, 2020

Turning to the Lord Who Comes to Judge the Earth, 34th Tuesday (II), November 24, 2020

Following the King and Lamb Wherever He Goes, 34th Monday (II), November 23, 2020

Most Recent Articles

Our Duty and Salvation, The Anchor, November 27, 2020

Living the Reality of the Kingdom of Christ, National Catholic Register, November 19, 2020

The Knights Our Age Needs, The Anchor, November 13, 2020

Remembering Andrew Walther, November 7, 2020

Just a Parish Priest, The Anchor, October 30, 2020

Coming to Know the Original Three-Dimensional Carlo Acutis, The Anchor, October 16, 2020

A Good Shepherd Full of Christian and Priestly Virtues, The Pilot, October 5, 2020

Returning to the Sacrament of Divine Love, The Anchor, September 18, 2020

The Pastoral Malpractice of Liturgical Abuse, The Anchor, September 4, 2020

The Chosen, The Anchor, August 21, 2020

Most Recent Talks

Receiving the Lord Jesus as Mary and Joseph, Advent Day of Recollection for the Leonine Forum, December 5, 2020

Novena in Preparation for the Immaculate Conception, Leonine Forum, November 28 to December 8, 2020

Blessed Michael McGivney and the Call to Holiness, McGivney Festival Young Adult Prayer Vigil, October 31, 2020

Apprenticeship in the Art of Living, Duc in Altum Virtual Schools Summit, October 28-30, 2020

Preaching on Marital Love and Accompanying Couples toward the Full Embrace of the Church's Teaching, Diocese of Gary Clergy Convocation, October 20, 2020

The Divorced and Remarried, Challenges and Triumphs in Pastoral Care, Diocese of Gary Clergy Convocation, October 20, 2020

The Heart of the New Evangelization: Meeting, Knowing and Loving Jesus Back, New Zealand Evangelion's in his Name Virtual Conference, October 10-11, 2020

Christian Anthropology: The Human Person in the Modern World, Leonine Forum Opening Lecture, October 8, 2020

Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching, UNSRC Catholic Club, August 27, 2020

Making Better Confessions, Catholic Information Conference, July 24, 2020

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Thank you!

