

AUGUST 2022

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

THE MAGAZINE

Record *L*ows in American Faith

The state of the union and our response



**Faith and Reason:
Contradictions?**



**St. John Vianney's
Roadmap**



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ETP: The Magazine

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Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project. He is the chair of the religion department at a Catholic high school on Long Island where he lives with his wife and son.

THE MISSION *AND* A CURRENT EVENT UPDATE

The Mission:

Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine exists to bring the reality and power of the empty tomb to as many people as possible. We are convinced that if practicing Catholics, and fallen away Catholics alike, encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are a Catholic magazine that desires to bring relevant cultural and spiritual topics to our readers in an honest and fresh manner. We dive into topics that truly matter to people, themes that are brought up in people's homes as well as in church circles. We desire to bring uniformity in message and an increase in inspiration to Catholics across Long Island.

Along with providing the most dynamic content we are committed to producing a product that is beautifully captivating to the eye. To do so we will always rely on the best Catholic designers (Startup Catholic) so that the content can be amplified by the aesthetics of the magazine.

In order to reach as many people as possible with the critically important message of Christ we rely on donors in order to grow the mission and impact of our magazine. This will allow us to remain free and ensure that anyone who desires to meet Jesus today will have that opportunity. If you feel called to support us, please reach out to me via email: EmptyTombProject@gmail.com and join us in the mission!

Current Event Update:

Last month we wrote about how Roe has overturned things, and it should overturn our approach in some ways. There have been many attacks (physical, verbal and metaphorical) on the Catholic Church since the landmark case was overturned by the Supreme Court last month. The pro-choice movement has become the ones living outside of the law in many ways. That makes them uncomfortable.

The Catholic response will be watched closely with these new circumstances. Are we hostile to those who are violent or are we willing to have a conversation and promote life even though the law is now on our side? We do not need to become hostile like some of our opponents once were when the roles were reversed.

The law is on our side, the side of truth and love. How will we respond now that we have been victorious? Let us be invigorated by the reversal and be a part of the team that uses it to further promote life and truth.

Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.

MAJOR HEADLINE:

Record Lows in American Faith

Contemporary America has never been less faithful.

In the 1940s, 50s, and 60s nearly 98% of Americans said they believed in God (according to Gallup). Between 1967 and 2011 the rate went from 98% to 92%. From 2011 to 2022 the rate plummeted from 92% to 81%.

Statistically, those who believe in God are still the majority, by a long shot. No one here is sounding an alarm that others are not aware of - the news here is not new. Less people believe and less people practice their faith than ever before. The concern is the rate in which the nation is declining in belief as well as the impact that unbelief has on the culture at large.

From 2017 to 2022, faith in God decreased by six percentage points. That is the same decrease over the 44 year span between 1967 and 2011. That means that general faith in our country is decreasing almost nine times the rate of the past. Naturally, it would be mathematically incorrect to assume that the country will continue to decrease at this rate every five years.

Nonetheless, it is clear that something has gone very wrong. The United States was founded with an assumption for and inclination towards a living faith. Belief in God and the practice of one's faith used to be a huge part of our identity. That was the soil from which we claimed to be independent.

Americans have "the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them." We further know "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Human beings are made for freedom and independence because we are made by God and for God. The further we drift from these lines in the Declaration of Independence the more we deny our God-given rights and our very own happiness. Viewing the very practical consequences of rising unbelief is not difficult.

Even before COVID-19, America was experiencing its highest rates on record of depression, anxiety and suicide. There are countless other factors (addiction, technology, broken families, etc.), but it is interesting to note that as faith numbers rapidly decrease, the numbers connected to unfulfillment rapidly increase.

What we are seeing is the destruction of one cultural imaginative vision for another. A recent must-read for how the faithful interact with the modern world mentions this. *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission* references the imaginative vision of a culture as the societal mindset. This is the fabric of a culture that contains the worldview of a given people. These are assumptions that are taken for granted by almost every member of a society.

(continued on the next page)





The only way, *the absolute only way*, to not be defeated during storms is to rely on a Presence.

America's prior cultural imaginative vision included faith, communal prayer and sacrificing one's own desires for the greater good. These are slowly but surely being switched out for unbelief, mockery of prayer, and the principle of unhindered liberty (I can do what I want, when I want, with whoever I want). The imaginative vision is here and that is why Gallup saw such a decrease in faith.

So, how do we respond and how do we live in a country that no longer accepts and borderline attacks Christian values? We are called to be the leaven and the light. Do we raise up the circumstances around us or do we deflate conversations with our negativity (even if it is warranted)? Do we further darken situations that are already a wreck because it is easy to gossip?

The way of the empty tomb is different. It is the way of leaven and light. We can serve the truth and call out what is wrong while still building and restoring rather than defaming and being prone to depression. Having deep seeded anxiety and pessimism towards the culture will not transform it. The only way, the absolute only way, to not be defeated during storms is to rely on a Presence.

To weather hurricanes people protect their homes against the wind and the surge. We must do the same by being realistic about the future and being reliant on the ever-present God. So we must, at a minimum, be committed to daily, consistent, and substantial prayer along with attending Sunday Mass every Sunday.

It sounds like nothing but that will become the fabric of our soul and family. Then that fabric can bleed into our schools and jobs so that the culture can see the worth of a life of faith. To turn the tide we must be committed to ongoing, personal conversion. That is the one thing in our complete control. From there we can build a community that shows the culture and our country that God's presence will flip the record lows.

Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine*.

Praying While Raising a Family: Be Present to the Simple



It's summer, and although I'm on vacation from teaching, life seems busier than ever.

"Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall be open—'Daddy, I'm thirsty.'" I put down my breviary (a form of prayer rooted in the psalms that priests, religious and lay people pray each day) and find my two-year-old's water bottle. "Thank you, Daddy".

"Come let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the Rock who saves. Let us approach—Peter took my pokemon!" I close my breviary and pray for patience as I try to bring peace to a Pokemon battle between my nine and five year old sons.

Eventually, I get back to my prayer seat and try again. "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit—have you seen my pink marker?" My seven year old is trying to finish her current coloring project and needs immediate attention.

Poppy from the Trolls movies is pink. Trolls just wanna have fun. I just want to pray.

Making time to pray at school is much more straightforward. For the most part, my schedule is fixed. Our school chapel has a hidden prayer space with a full view of a very large crucifix and the tabernacle. If I can just avoid extemporaneous conversation in the hallway as I make my way from my office to the chapel, I can sit with God for a period of time in silence. I am spiritually spoiled.

Being home presents a different challenge to my daily prayer life. It's not a battle with interior distractions but navigating the daily responsibilities of a husband and father while trying to maintain a disciplined prayer life. The reality is that my prayer life must adapt when I'm home - I must adapt.

Extended periods of silence are difficult to find while attending to four children under the age of nine. St. Thomas More is quoted as once saying, "The ordinary acts we practice every day at home are of more importance to the soul than their simplicity

might suggest." I received St. Thomas More's quote in a daily email subscription called the Catholic Morning Offering as I was transitioning to a fuller role at home. Reflecting upon these words has led me to some important conclusions.

Being present is of the utmost importance. For instance, if the prayer time I have chiseled out is interrupted by my daughter who needs help with her legos, then so be it. The Lord has presented a chance for me to be a loving, attentive father. In fact, I believe our God continually offers us opportunities for spiritual growth hidden in the normal and ordinary. The stack of dishes in the sink or the pile of dirty laundry can be a prayerful practice if I am intentional with my actions and attitude.

It is also critical to be aware of my thoughts if they are being consumed by self-pity, impatience, and frustration. If I choose to carry these emotions out as I walk the road of service, every step will feel heavy and burdened. Christ's invitation, however, is completely the opposite: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart...For my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Matt. 11:29-30). When we invite Christ into these ordinary moments, we grow in relationship with Him because we are made like Him.

I have learned that even my most distracted days at home can be punctuated with times of simple prayer with the family. Meals offer a perfect opportunity for thanksgiving as well as petitionary prayer. We try to offer a prayer for some intention each meal followed by a Hail Mary. Lost toys or keys present a perfect time to ask for the intercession of St. Anthony. Recently, we have been ending our day with the Surrender Novena. It is a simple way to cap off the bedtime ritual. Even my two-year-old has learned the response "Jesus, take care of everything!"

Simple and ordinary. Perfect.

Matthew Chicavich teaches religion and physics at a Catholic high school on Long Island where he lives with his wife and four children. He has a masters degree in theology and a bachelor's degree in physics.

IS THE CHURCH RIGHT? ARE FAITH AND REASON CONTRADICTIONS?

One night around ten years ago, some friends and I sat around a campfire talking. I was discerning the priesthood in seminary at the time. Having discovered I was in seminary, a friend of a friend approached me.

“Kelly told me you’re becoming a priest.”

“Yeah,” I said.

“That’s cool, man. Yeah, I’m not into faith; I’m actually an atheist. But it’s cool what you’re doing..”

I was surprised and confused at his thinking I was cool for pursuing the priesthood.

“Thanks, man,” I said. “I appreciate that.”

“Yeah. I don’t know. I think faith is a gift I just haven’t received yet.”

A gift I haven’t received yet.

The question of faith’s relationship to reason is a perennial one, where nowadays the question is not what is reason’s place within faith but whether or not faith has any value in our increasingly secular age. Some argue that faith is unnecessary in light of scientific and technological advances. Others might respond that the truths of the Christian faith are needed now more than ever so as to inform, heal, and uplift the minds of the intellectually lost and curious.

Underneath those responses, fundamental questions remain: Are the truths of faith at odds with man’s capacity to know naturally? Does faith oppose reason? Even if they are compatible, does a slight tension lie between them?

There are two extremes in the faith and reason debate. On the one hand there are skeptics, most of whom are atheists, who claim faith is fundamentally and essentially opposed to reason. Skeptics argue that insofar as the apparent-truths of faith cannot be empirically measured or verified, faith cannot be proven and therefore is invalid and untrue. The most extreme skeptics and atheists will even claim that faith is harmful to the human person.

Equally radical are those on the other side—fideists. Like skeptics, fideists maintain that faith and reason are opposed, but their position is that the truths of faith are what is necessary for human knowledge. The most radical of fideists claim that the intellect has been so wounded by original sin that it is not worth pursuing knowledge outside of what is necessary for salvation. In turn, some fideists hold the Bible to be the only source of knowledge—historical, moral, and divine. At their worst, fideists can become Biblical fundamentalists, shunning the world and all that is good and knowable.

The Catholic Church takes a middle way. The Church maintains that faith and reason are not contradictions, but, as St. John Paul II famously put it, the “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.” In that contemplation of truth, reason and faith can best be understood as natural and supernatural ways of knowing and contemplating.

In the broadest sense, “reason” refers to man’s capacity to know things within his own reality. Reason, as described here, excludes the influence of divine grace; reason takes place outside the realm of divine revelation. Reason may conclude that divine things exist, but it cannot know the divine intimately or personally.

“Faith” refers to those truths revealed to man by God that are necessary for man’s sanctification and salvation. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the truths of faith are added onto human knowledge so that man can order his life towards his supernatural end. Reason has its natural end: knowing things within this world. Faith impels man to know and assent to the world to come.

It is worth distinguishing the movement of faith. The truths of faith are divinely revealed, first and foremost. They are given. Man’s first movement in faith is not assent, but reception. Man must first receive what God offers. Thus, in faith, the process of knowing is opposite that of reason: God acts first, revealing truths about Himself, then the knower receives this truth, recognizes them as reasonable, and places his intellect before these truths to investigate.

It is important to note, however, that the contents of revelation are neither opposed to nor are they foreign to reason. On the contrary, the contents of revelation, the truths of faith, contain reasonable, ordered elements recognizable by reason whereby man can say, “That truth of faith is reasonable and worth believing.”

If it appears that faith and reason are in opposition, either the truth of faith is misunderstood or man’s reasoning is in error. The principle of noncontradiction—and our experience of everyday life—shows that something cannot be simultaneously true and untrue. One thing cannot exist and not exist at the same time. That is equally true in the order of knowledge, most especially the knowledge of God—a gift waiting to be received.

Daniel McQuillan teaches in the Humanities Department at a boarding school in Rhode Island where he lives with his wife and son. He holds two degrees in philosophy. His main area of interest is the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas.



St. John Vianney's Roadmap

The following is an excerpt from a *Crisis Magazine* article by Thomas Griffin for the feast day of the Cure of Ars.

"If there were only three like you in France, I would not be able to set foot there," said Satan to a future saint serving as a parish priest.

St. John Vianney (1786-1859), also known as the Cure of Ars, is the patron saint of parish priests whose feast day is August 4th. His deep sanctity sheds light on what the Catholic Church desperately needs to focus on if her members desire to literally renew the face of the earth.

Catholics can often over-romanticize the lives of saints and sugarcoat the difficulties they had to experience. There was much revival needed in Vianney's era. The Enlightenment (1715-1789) ended when he was three years old, but its effects continued to change European society for generations. He also endured the French Revolution (1789-1799) as a young boy. The gradual collapse of the American Church and the confusion of our age pales in comparison to the outright denial of faith from the Enlightenment and the heinous persecutions of the French Revolution.

All that being said, denial of the importance of faith and even outright persecution are not foreign to our times. St. John Vianney can teach Catholics tremendous lessons for how we ought to look for hope and carve out pathways forward in our own time. No Catholic can ignore the call for continual conversion, especially when the world appears to laugh at the very idea of faith.

Salvation, redemption and renewal come only from the sanctity that Christ can give and nothing else. The Cure of Ars shows us how to become sanctified. He was most known as a director of souls who would spend countless hours a day in the confessional while always being willing to speak with pilgrims who traveled from around the world to see him.

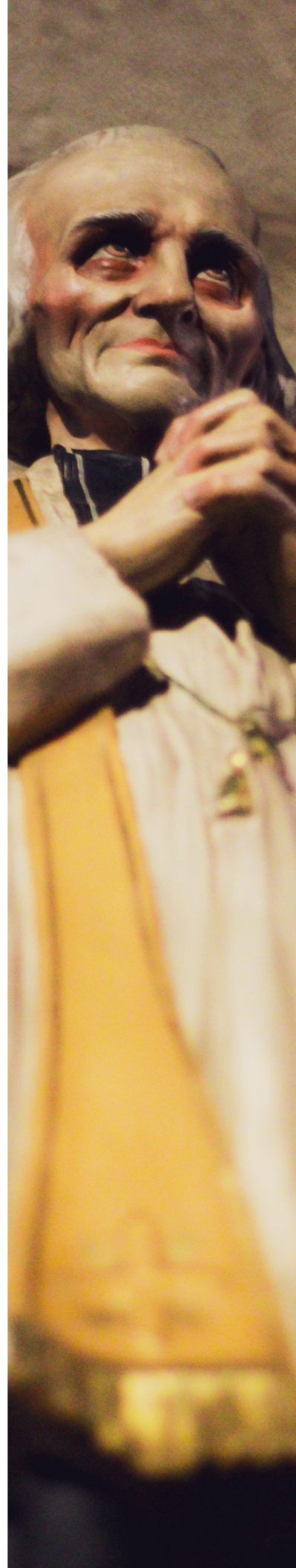
In the *Catechetical Instructions*, Vianney writes at length about what is needed for salvation. He focuses, primarily, on the call to pray and love. These two simple words contain the antidote for an age drowning in confusion spread by leadership, vitriol between believers, and rampant rises in disbelief among Christ's flock.

"My little children, reflect on these words: the Christian's treasure is not on earth but in heaven. Our thoughts, then ought to be directed to where our treasure is. This is the glorious duty of man: to pray and to love. If you pray and love, that is where a man's happiness lies."

Becoming a person of prayer and love in the midst of our tumultuous times is no easy task. Confusion from our shepherds, tanking statistics regarding faith and Sunday worship along with the growing awareness that our country and culture are vehemently against the very fabric of the Catholic Church can leave many to despair. In the midst of all these facts, we must remember where our treasure is and how it is to be uncovered.

Prayer and charity serve as the roadmap, but they are not as ambiguous as they sound. Thankfully, St. John Vianney does not leave these words open to abstract notions; he grounds them in the practical. The chaos of our time will only be eradicated by an authentic mysticism and love that is grounded in Christ's actions and will result in the reaping of a bountiful harvest of renewal.

Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.





By Marc Piperno

Inspired by their beloved Grandpa Nunzi, keeping the traditions of the good ole days alive has become the center of owner Michael Napolitano's vision. To sit at the dinner table to talk and laugh with friends and family, while enjoying an elevated take on old world Italian cooking, Nunzis invites you to come and experience the "New" Good Ole Days and create more memorable moments for the people in your life that you care about.

Opening last October, Nunzis is quickly becoming the hottest new restaurant in Farmingdale. With the help of Michael's father Vincent and brother Vincent Jr., they have all worked tirelessly to demonstrate that the incredible dishes made in the kitchen are only rivaled by the fantastic hospitality of Nunzis, where everybody is treated like a VIP. Traditions and respect for the good ole days, have all been incorporated into a sleek and modern layout by renowned designer Derek Axelrod.

"In keeping our grandfather's traditions alive, you will eat with us, drink with us and laugh with us. Families and friends will all enjoy delicious food, fine drinks, good music and making memories," states Napolitano. The modern take on classic dishes, highlights a menu

that incorporates unique twists on old school Italian meals. With superb creations such as Grandmas Meatballs, Pappardelle & Lamb, Heritage Pork Chop; and desserts like Cannoli Cream with Biscotti.

Not to be missed are fascinating interpretations that will satisfy the cravings of adventurous foodies such as one-of-a-kind Limoncello Chicken Wings and a boisterous menu placement of a Philly Cheesesteak Sandwich. What Chefs Anthony LoCastro and Marc Wisehart have collaborated to produce, are memorable moments on a plate.

Nunzis is considered, by its loyalists as an immersive cultural experience that warmly embraces. The moment guests walk in the door they are dazzled by a lively environment that is both edgy and delightful. Both Axelrod and the Napolitano's worked harmoniously to launch what has now become a distinct trademark at Nunzis. Michael Napolitano seeks to enchant young and old alike by capturing a fresh, contemporary, and sleek look, with nods to the glamour and romance of classic Italian meals.

For more information, please visit nunzis1274.com, and on Instagram at [@nunzisingdale](https://www.instagram.com/nunzisingdale).

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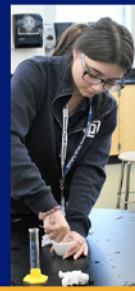
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