

The Invitation

WHAT WE FOUND

- Men carried a paralysed man to Jesus, could not get in, and let him down through the tiles; Mark 2:3-4 adds that there were four of them and that they dug out an opening. And when he saw **their** faith, he forgave the man, who had not said a word.
- They opened somebody's roof to do it. And the obstacle between them and Jesus was the crowd, which is to say the people already inside listening.
- In the banquet parable the servant is sent three times, each time further out, and the excuses given by the first group are all ordinary and none of them are hostile.
- The third sending says "compel people to come in." St. Augustine used that phrase to defend coercion against the Donatists, and on this the Church now teaches otherwise: the act of faith is by its nature free, no one may be forced to embrace it, and the use of civil coercion to compel religious adherence is rejected.
- The immediate obstacle is often practical rather than theological. It is that they cannot picture the ninety minutes and do not know what to say about Communion.
- Say the Communion thing in advance and kindly, giving the real reason: the Church understands receiving as a statement of full communion with her.
- An invitation is not one until it names a specific thing at a specific time, and it should be easy to decline.
- For most people the first invitation should be a table with Catholics at it. That is not a reason never to get to the liturgy.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine, and a mistake worth naming

St. Augustine used "compel them to come in" from this parable, in his letters concerning the Donatists, to defend the use of state coercion against schismatics. He is among the greatest of the Fathers, and this study has quoted him more than anyone else. What the Church now teaches, and what he defended, have to be stated precisely: the act of faith is by its nature free and no one may be forced to embrace it, so using civil coercion to compel religious adherence is rejected. Note the distinction he himself worked with, between forcing interior assent, which he also rejected, and applying civil pressure to the already baptised, which he defended and which the Church does not.

The Church's settled teaching is that the act of faith is of its very nature free, that nobody may be forced to embrace the faith against his will, and that Christ invited people to faith and refused to impose it by force. Hold both halves together. An account that only ever quotes saints approvingly is training people to argue badly.

St. Augustine, from his correspondence concerning the Donatists, where Letters 93 and 185 are the passages usually cited; read against Dignitatis Humanae 2, 7 and 10 and CCC 160. Document-level citation, since the letter numbering should be checked against the edition used.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on what a confessional is not

The confessional, Pope Francis wrote, must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best.

Say it out loud, because some Catholics carry a bad experience in a confessional from years ago, and it can quietly shape how they approach the sacrament afterward. They will not invite anyone to something they are themselves avoiding.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 44 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Vianney, who simply stayed in the box

The Curé of Ars spent extraordinary hours hearing confessions, in later years for the better part of a day, as people travelled from across France to a village that had been notable for nothing. He was not a scholar and had struggled badly with his studies for the priesthood.

What he did was make himself available, relentlessly, in one place, for years. It is worth remembering, because the whole point of what follows is lowering the cost of somebody else's next step.

St. John Vianney, from the standard accounts of his ministry at Ars. Historical summary, not a quotation; a named biography should be supplied before publication.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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This week. You have already sent one. Now handle what comes back.

- If they said yes: confirm the time, and be outside ten minutes early. Do the two minute explanation before you walk in. Sit next to them the whole way through.
- If they said no: reply warmly, do not explain, do not ask why, and do not offer an alternative in the same message. The banquet parable has three sendings, and the delay this study suggests is prudential advice rather than something the parable teaches; the sendings there run within one continuous sequence.
- If they did not reply: leave it alone as your default. Non-response can be oversight as easily as refusal, so one gentle follow-up later is fine; chasing it is not.
- Either way, find out your parish's confession times and the OCIA contact this week, and write both down where you can find them.
- And go to Confession yourself before you invite anyone else to it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And when he saw their faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Luke 5:20

GOING FURTHER

Write down three things and keep them somewhere you will find them: the Mass you would bring a stranger to, your parish's confession times, and the name of whoever runs OCIA. And go to Confession yourself before you invite anyone else to it.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

- **CCC 1422-1424, 1458.** The sacrament of Penance, the names the Church gives it, and the recommendation of confession even when not strictly necessary.
- **CCC 1400.** Eucharistic intercommunion with the communities of the Reformation is not possible, and the reason why.
- **CCC 1401.** The narrow exceptions, judged by the diocesan bishop or episcopal conference under the stated conditions.
- **CCC 160.** The act of faith is free by its nature. **CCC 1389, 2181.** The Sunday obligation.