

Will I go back to Mass?

By [Chris Sidoti](#) | [Australia](#)

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Now that the lockdown has eased and public worship is resuming, a prominent Catholic in Australia wonders if it's really worth going back to church



For almost 70 years I went to Mass virtually every Sunday. The only times I can remember when I didn't were when I was in a conservative Islamic country where churches were either non-existent or very hard to find.

All that changed in March, when the COVID-19 lockdown closed churches in Sydney. I haven't been inside a church since then.

Now they are open again and the number allowed to attend makes returning possible. So, after more than seven months, I am confronted with the question: Will I go back to Mass?

The first thing I need to say is that my absence seems to have made no difference to God whatsoever. God is neither happier nor sadder that I haven't been there. I acknowledge that I have been going for years and years for my own sake, not for God's.

The second question, therefore, is what has been the effect on me of going?

I firmly believe that I need to worship God as part of a worshipping community. The problem is that the experience of worshipping in community is so bad.

That abominable English translation of the Roman Missal

The "celebration" of Mass is rarely uplifting, rarely celebratory. It's been far worse since 2011.

That's when the Vatican imposed a new [English translation](#) of the Roman Missal, a terrible translation carried out by the "Vox Clara Commission" and its chairman, Cardinal George Pell.

This translation is an abomination before God. It was supposed to be a close translation of the Latin original. But it is not. In some places it omits words that are in the Latin. In other places, it adds words.

It was supposed to be more elegant. But it is not. All those interminable sentences without ever seeing a full stop! It is also riddled with heresy. For example, there is the frequent prayer that we may merit salvation.

For the last nine years now, I have gone to Mass each week and not said an audible word, apart from the Our Father, which, though archaic, has not been subjected to a new bad translation.

I mumble the words of the 1973 version of the people's parts under my breath. I can't bring myself to utter a word of the "Vox Clara" translation, not even the great "Amen" at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer that affirms all the awful language that has gone before it.

I have not experienced the Eucharist as the summit and source of Christian life. Each Sunday I am angrier and more alienated at the end of the Mass than I was at the beginning.

Is this what I go to Mass for? Do I want to go back to this? Can I go back?

One question leads to another.

A crisis of ordained male leadership

The institutional Roman Church is like a failed state, hollowed out from within and imploding on itself. The sexual abuse crisis has been revealed to be widespread, affecting every country and every diocese and at every level.

It seems that the most catholic characteristic of the Catholic Church is pedophilia. The sins of commission and omission can no longer be described as the work of a few bad apples. The institutional church is a pedophilic institution.

Then there is the crisis of leadership. The most defining quality of the episcopacy is mediocrity, at least in Australia. It's hard to find a bishop in this country who is capable of leading. What most of them say and do is totally irrelevant even to most Catholics. The thought of them evangelizing the world is laughable.

Most diocesan priests in Australia are men totally out of their depth, expected to lead two or three parishes – alone, unequipped and unsupported. And they seem too frightened to empower their parish laity to take over the responsibility.

I remember when the new translation of the Missal was introduced and every priest I knew expressed disgust at it. I said, "Then don't use it. In this priest-starved diocese, what can your mediocre bishop do to you? Sack you?"

They all hated the horrible translation, but none was prepared to refuse to use it. Sad men struggling to sustain a sad institution. The crisis in ordained leadership is not a crisis of quantity, but a crisis of quality.

The refusal to entrust women with real Church leadership

Then there's the misogyny. Not even the lack of male priests can induce a change of heart towards women on the part of the male leadership. If clear self-interest won't produce change, then what will?

Women constitute well over half the remaining church-going population. Without doubt, there are extraordinary leaders among them who could get us out of the mess our male leaders have put us in. But they are not permitted to do so.

A failed institution is one that resolutely refuses to grasp the ways forward that God gives it.

Then there's the corruption, the product of the total absence of transparency and accountability. There are no clear procedures for decision-making, no due process or natural justice – and, of course, no financial responsibility. Even as the Bishop of Rome struggles to pry open the hidden finances of the Vatican, diocesan and parish finances in the Australian church remain opaque and secret.

None of these is a new issue. All of them have been issues for decades. But the context for me has changed.

Before the pandemic, when I went to Mass every week, the default position was to continue going. Stopping would have required a decision to stop and there were many reasons not to decide.

Now, having not gone to Mass for seven months, the default position is to continue not going. Now, I have to make a decision to return if I am to go back.

And a decision to go back to Mass is necessarily a decision to affirm and to assent to belonging to a Church that is characterized by pedophilia, mediocrity, misogyny and corruption.

Will I go back to Mass? Can I go back to Mass?

I don't know.

***Chris Sidoti** is a lawyer and international human rights consultant. He served as Australia's Human Rights Commissioner and is a former member of now dismantled Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.*

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