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Catholics have recently been prominent in the news, too often for all the wrong reasons.

A "Stop the Steal" flag was [flown](#) at the home of Catholic Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito. Catholic Harrison Butker [announced](#) to college graduating women their place is marriage, motherhood and homemaking. Catholic Justice Clarence Thomas complained about being criticized for accepting [gifts](#) that could compromise his ability to judge in fairness, and his refusal to [recuse](#) himself from cases for which his wife has taken public and extreme positions. The [Vatican](#) and [bishops](#) issue condemning statements on "gender theory" instead of expressions of love toward humans in deep soul-wrenching reflection on their sexual identity.

All these are often considered a nod to 'Catholic tradition'.

From what era does this tradition draw its inspiration? Why Latin when, in the church's first two centuries, Greek was the liturgical language? Why celibacy when in the first thousand years priests were married? Why is Vatican II so maligned as a break from tradition when it was that gathering that restored Scripture to the Mass? Prior to Vatican II we heard 1% of the Old and 17% of the New Testament at Mass. Now the Liturgy of the Word includes 14% of the Old Testament and 71% of the New.

And what of the "tradition" of [Acts 2:44-45](#) when the church members had everything in common and sold all their possessions for the poor? A socialist tradition 1,800 years before Karl Marx.

The two parishes closest to my home pride themselves on upholding tradition. Pro-life, silence on racism, critical of public education and LGTBQ, and not a word about the [synod on synodality](#) or Pope Francis' encyclical [Laudato Si'](#). I've attended many times — but those factors and a foreboding air of unwelcome have ended my visits.

One of the parishes last year hosted a "Patriotic Rosary" for July 4. The event was billed as time to recite the rosary alongside patriotic songs and words from our Founding Fathers.

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I wrote to the parish to let them know I would not be attending an event that conflated God's reign with American nationalism. Further, an event that excused Thomas Jefferson for having sexual relations with his teenaged Black [servant](#) and George Washington for his desperate attempts to [return](#) Africans who fought with England back to slavery was offensive to this African American Catholic.

Their reply was they were sorry I felt the way I did. No self-reflection, no empathy, no offer for dialogue, no change.

Despite all this, I love my Catholic Church. I love the liturgical year, the Easter Vigil, the feast of Sacred Heart, Catholic social teaching, Archbishop [Óscar Romero](#), [Dorothy Day](#), Sr. [Thea Bowman](#), [Thomas Merton](#), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bishop [Thomas Gumbleton](#), Archbishop [Raymond Hunthausen](#), Black Catholic presence, the work of religious sisters, Fr. [Ignacio Ellacuría](#), the synodal process, and the daily witness of selfless Catholic service to others.

I also am inspired by Catholic women who persist in devotion, service, and critique of an institution that to date refuses to fully recognize their gifts and talents. I am further empowered by Black Catholics who overlook outright racism and subtle indifference to remain faithful.

[Leonardo Boff's *Church: Charism and Power*](#) reminds us "the church is not a completely defined entity; it is always open to new situations and cultural encounters, and within these realities must incarnate and proclaim the liberating message of Jesus Christ."

Further, [Sandra Schneiders](#) notes that when Jesus breathed on his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit ([John 20:22](#)) it was not the "twelve," but most likely included Mary Magdalene, Mary, Martha, Lazarus and many others, a diverse and equally commissioned gathering.

The mystery of God, the love of Christ, and the freedom of the Spirit cannot be possessed, controlled, restrained or directed by a hierarchy or institution or tradition.

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Thus, my current "parish" is through [Catholic Women Preach](#), attending online gatherings with other Catholics, and participating in [FutureChurch](#), [Discerning Deacons](#) and other virtual events.

I love the Mass, and therefore attend, virtually, different parishes around the country. During the Mass, I "receive" the body and blood of Christ, forgoing the "Prayer of Spiritual Communion" in favor of bread and wine I believe is consecrated by the presiding priest on my computer screen. I prefer in-person reception, but without that privilege I am not going to pass up the opportunity to become one with Christ and all the members of his body.

The mystery of God, the love of Christ, and the freedom of the Spirit, like [Hans Küng](#) pointed out in *The Church, Maintained in Truth*, cannot be possessed, controlled, restrained or directed by a hierarchy or institution or tradition. Jesus told us in [John 3](#) the Spirit is like the wind whose origins and future direction is yet unknown to us. Why then confine ourselves to a limited "traditional" faith and structure?

And as I am aware of the apparent failures of the church and individual bishops, parishes and Catholics, I am also aware of my own shortcomings. Thus, I cannot and do not deprive myself of the grace and holiness available in the sacraments, the Word, and the gathered catholic community.

Paul prayed that we be "filled with the fullness of God" ([Ephesians 3:19](#)); I intend to seek that fullness through Christ, and through the creative and varied ways the people of God come together as his presence on earth.

A version of this story appeared in the **July 5-18, 2024** print issue under the headline: I love the Catholic Church — despite what some call 'tradition'.