

CHURCH CHAT BY TOM SMITH

PREDICTIONS

Wishes are not predictions. In my last column, I sent Christmas wishes to the Church. We are now in a New Year and new decade, and it is time to make a few predictions.

This predicting thing is really dangerous. Who knows what will happen in 2011? And, why even try? It gets even more hazardous if I become specific about these predictions. Regardless, I'm going to take a stab at it. I would try to get this column published in the Catholic version of the *National Enquirer* but I can't find a Catholic version. Maybe some right-wing, fundamentalist Catholic paper would be interested, but I seriously doubt it.

- Anyway, I will begin with a very safe prediction. There will be hundreds of millions of Catholics around the world who will find spiritual support, inspiration, faith, hope, and love within their Catholic communities. They will experience both comfort and challenge as they walk, or run, on their journey to God during the next twelve months.
- Here's another safe one: hundreds of millions of people, Catholic and non-Catholic, will be served by our hospitals, schools, charitable organizations, and individuals committed to supporting the poor, responding to basic needs, alleviating suffering in all its forms, and providing comfort to the sick, dying, and grieving.
- Here's where the predicting gets tougher: the Pope will experience serious physical or mental illness during the year to the point where his illness will interfere with his pontificating. Unnamed Cardinals will position themselves to be electable candidates to succeed Benedict XVI.
- The sex abuse/cover-up scandal will continue with more sex abuse revelations in various parts of the world and more evidence that the cover-up procedures were sanctioned, and perhaps initiated, by the Vatican. The sex abuse incidents will broaden to include more heterosexual abusive relationships. There will be more public awareness of the widespread disregard for celibacy among the clergy. On another level, the scandal will hit new heights in terms of the economic cost incurred through settlements and law suits.
- By the end of the year 2011, another spreading scandal will emerge: the financial mismanagement of many parish and diocesan funds. The inadequate accounting practices in many parishes and dioceses, and the lack of effective

diocesan oversight and auditing practices, will gradually become public. "Where has all the money gone?" will get unconvincing answers. There will also be reports of dwindling contributions nationwide and in certain dioceses. While the poor economy will be blamed as the official reason for this decline, there will also be indications that parish, diocesan, and national mismanagement and financial naiveté, ineptitude, and downright embezzlement are also major contributing factors to this downturn.

- The trend toward declining parish attendance by Catholics in the US will continue. There will be no major effort to discover why Catholics are dropping out (no exit interviews, for example) and barely any interest in the reality itself.
- The reaction to the liturgical changes towards the end of the year will meet with general outrage initially but will be grudgingly accepted as we move into 2012. The impact of these autocratic, top-down, ridiculous changes will not be recorded in the exit interviews that will not be conducted, as in the previous prediction.
- There will be more Latin Masses, a reduced role for lay ecclesial ministers, and fewer ministries as parishes and dioceses move toward a pre-Vatican II style of parish life.
- Vocations to priesthood and religious life will decline some more, and the average age of priests and religious will get still older.
- At least 5 Bishops in the US will publically break with the conservative majority and support optional celibacy for priests and the ordination of women.
- Add your own (and let me know):

If these predictions come true, remember them a year from now. If they don't, forget this column.

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