

Easter Sunday 2026
Homily of Bishop Barres
St. Agnes Cathedral
April 5, 2026

404 catechumens received the Sacraments of Initiation last night at our Easter Vigils across the Diocese of Rockville Centre and we have a total of 1000 new Catholics on Long Island, the highest number that we have on record.

News outlets around the country from the *New York Times* to *Newsday* to the chic young women's magazine *Evie* are all seeing this rise in young new Catholics and the practice of the Catholic faith among young adults and are trying to report on the reasons for it.

I especially liked the Holy Thursday, April 2 headline in *Evie*: "NYC's Hottest New Club is Catholic Mass." Young adults are meeting each other at Old St. Patrick's Cathedral near Little Italy, St. Joseph's in Greenwich Village, St. Vincent Ferrer on the Upper East Side, and our own St. Barnabas parish in Bellmore around the cosmic power of the Catholic Mass.

They seem to have grasped and embraced JRR Tolkien's wisdom: "The Holy Eucharist is the true way of all our loves upon earth" -- not to mention, the true way of meeting a spiritually beautiful future Catholic spouse!

I would like to begin this Easter Sunday homily by quoting at length Brea O'Donnell's Holy Thursday article from *Evie*. My goal in doing this is to reach out to our middle school and high school students, our college students back home for Easter and our working young adults in the process of making life decisions.

But I'm also sharing it to give some hope to the parents and grandparents I speak to weekly who express the heartache they experience because many of their children and grandchildren no longer practice the Catholic faith.

So here goes!

"There's a new hot-spot taking over, and there's no cover charge or VIP section in sight.

Walk into the right church this Easter, or any Sunday lately, and the scene might surprise you. Packed pews. Standing room only. 20-and-30-somethings and beyond in their prettiest [spring dresses](#) and young men in pressed collared shirts and button-downs, lingering long after the service ends to talk, laugh, and swap Instagram handles. It's an energy that's warm and intoxicating... even without the bottomless mimosas. One [viral tweet](#) recently described a packed Sunday Mass in Manhattan as 'the hottest club in NYC right now,' and she wasn't exaggerating. Something major is happening across the country, in Catholic cathedrals and in all denominations and non-denominational services: young people are going to church.

Gen Z, once labeled a godless generation—atheist at worst, agnostic at best—have come rushing back, fueled by their fire for the Church's framework of femininity and masculinity, for truth, for God. Right now, [Bible sales](#) are at a 20-year high.... We're seeing baptisms on college campuses. A hunger for reverence. And a return to Christianity like we've never seen before. And the best part is, they actually *want* to be there, they're not going because their parents are dragging them. They're all grown up now, setting their alarms, putting on real clothes and showing up entirely by their own will. And the energy in those rooms reflects it.

This isn't just a niche phenomenon happening in one isolated city or parish. From Manhattan to Boston, Nashville to Palm Beach, Dallas to Los Angeles, churches that were once half-empty and struggling with declining attendance are suddenly seeing an overflow at the door on Sunday mornings. And the people filling those seats are noticeably younger than in years prior...

With Holy Week upon us, the momentum is only building. Easter services this year are expected to draw record numbers of young first-timers and returnees. People who are curious, people who felt nudged to go back, people who saw a friend post about it and thought, you know what, maybe I'll try it, or try it again, too. The chapel doors are wide open, and more young men and women than ever are walking through them.

Organized religion got a really bad rap for a while there. Some of it was earned. But a lot of it came from a moment in time that managed to convince an entire generation that they could build a life of meaning and purpose entirely apart from God. That self-improvement, radical autonomy and a really [good therapist](#) were enough. But for a lot of us, they weren't.

Part of what we're seeing now is a reaction... to reconsider the role of God, virtue, and responsibility in their lives.

Church offers a moral framework for how to live, how to treat one another, [how to make sense of our suffering](#) rather than trying to manifest our way out of it. It offers guidance... reasoning... hope. A sense of purpose that extends far beyond our own personal goals of self-optimization.

For a long time, the dominant idea in culture was that freedom meant the removal of all structure. No rules, no authority, no inherited belief systems telling you how to live. It sold us the idea that you could design your entire identity from scratch and shape your life entirely on your own terms. And for a while, that felt liberating. Until it didn't. Because it turns out that total autonomy doesn't actually give young people what they hoped it would. It gives you options, yes, but it fails to give you direction. It gives you freedom, but not meaning. It gives you [endless choices](#), but with no clear sense of what is actually worth choosing. And at some point, it all became exhausting.

People are disenchanted by the belief that re-inventing themselves and curating their lives around whatever the latest self-improvement influencer promises will finally bring them fulfillment. Because it hasn't. And it won't.

Christianity offers something different. It tells you that meaning is something you find by stepping into it. That your existence on this Earth is not random. That your struggles are not pointless. That there is a way to live that is deeply meaningful and available to everyone, whether you choose to participate in it or not.

For a generation raised by the internet, the realization of there being something greater than them to guide their steps is genuinely a relief.

For years, everything was filtered through irony. You couldn't be too earnest without fear of seeming uncool. Faith, in particular, was something people kept private and at an arm's length, even if they were sincerely curious or excited about it.

Now more than ever, people are more willing to voice their beliefs. To admit they crave something deeper. To identify with their religion proudly...

What's beautiful about Christianity is that you can walk in exactly as you are. Skeptical, distracted, unsure... but the experience itself has a way of cutting through

all of that. The stillness. The structure. The sense that you've just stepped in to something that pre-dates you and will continue long after you. It's difficult to remain detached, and young people don't want to anymore.

What's particularly striking is *where* within Christianity this hunger is leading them. Gen Z isn't gravitating toward the casual, feel-good faith of their parents' generation: the Sunday-sometimes, hold-the-doctrine, skip-the-hard-parts version that dominated the 80s and 90s. They're going in the opposite direction entirely...and the more reverent, historically grounded expressions of Catholicism are seeing some of the sharpest growth. Prayers that predate your grandparents' grandparents. Beauty turns out to be an extraordinarily effective front door. The altar, the chant, the incense—none of it needs to be explained or sold. It simply moves people. For a generation that has been sold and re-sold every version of self-reinvention imaginable, a rite that hasn't changed in centuries isn't intimidating.

Easter, the most hopeful Christian holiday of the year, is a natural on-ramp for anyone who's been curious but hasn't known where to start...Maybe the most significant place to be this Easter isn't the high-end restaurant with the two-hour wait. Maybe it's the church down the street that's been there the whole time, with a room full of friends you haven't met yet and a [Mass] that might just leave you feeling more hopeful than you expected.

If you've been thinking about it, let this be your sign.”

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ that we celebrate on Easter Sunday is the “Big Bang” of all Catholic evangelization and mission.

We give God thanks on this Easter morning for the record-setting 1000 new Catholics we have on Long Island.

I also thank each of you for the humble, compassionate and bold way that you daily cast the nets of Christ's love and the Church's mission into your secular networks and workplaces.

It was Pope St. John Paul II who taught us that our Catholic faith only grows, when we are daily sharing it with others.

May the Light that shines from the Glorified Wounds of the Risen Christ continue to illumine the path of our young people.

And as we approach the 250th anniversary of our nation, may many of them one day be added to the list of great Catholic American saints.

Happy and Blessed Easter to you and your families!

Jesus Christ is Risen, Alleluia, Alleluia!

