

Week 18 Ordinary Time - 2026

Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145; Romans 8:35,37-39; Matt 14:13

Over my vacation I had time to eat a little ice-cream, go on walks with our new dog 'Bruce' and the family and ponder some problems that face the Church. The problems of the universal Church are our problems. Specifically, I have been concerned about the excommunication of the Bishops of Society of St Pope Pius the X (or SSPX), and the selection of Andy Burnham as the UK's prime-minister. The more I thought about it the more I was surprised to realise how closely they were inter-linked.

I want to begin by reading six words from today's Gospel. Jesus has been preaching and healing the sick, perhaps for most of the day. Now his disciples come and suggest that he tells his followers to go and get something to eat. Instead, Jesus says, *'You give them something to eat.'* The problem is that they have not got much: They need Jesus to do what is required, to feed the people. The reading has very Eucharistic overtones, of the Last Supper and of His Crucifixion.

The SSPX is a Catholic organisation founded in 1970 which largely rejects the Second Vatican council, and the reforms of the Catholic Church that it generated. You can have sympathy for what the SSPX stands for. They wish the Mass to be beautiful and give honour to God. They wish their priests to be holy. They wish to be faithful to Holy Scripture and Tradition. They wish the lay people to approach Holy Communion with awe and reverence. They are deeply in love

with the person of Jesus Christ. It is not too hard to see what they find difficult to accept some of the things they see happening in the Catholic Church today: a lack of understanding of the basics of the faith such the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament; that Jesus is God and Man; that Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation are marks of holiness not family occasions; that the Blessed Virgin Mary is especially to be venerated and is not just like other women; that coming into church is like coming to a wedding not a pool party; and that sex outside of marriage is a grave sin. And no, drums really are not a perfectly acceptable part of the liturgy. But, on 1st July the SSPX made a huge mistake which crossed the line from faithful dissent to schism – creating a fracture – and being excommunicated.

Two SSPX bishops consecrated 4 other priests as bishops, without the pope's blessing. Bishops acting in unity with the Pope is an essential, visible underpinning of the unity of the Church that Jesus Christ established at Pentecost. The SSPX said that the consecrations of the new Bishops were due to the church being in "*a state of necessity.*" *ie.* that is to say a crises so significant that the norms of the church are suspended. But, this was a deliberate and considered act of disobedience which gave Pope Leo little alternative. Bishop Egan of Portsmouth Diocese wrote that the effect of the Pope's decree is that "*all the bishops and priests who belong to the SSPX and the laypeople who exclusively attend their services are now excommunicated.*"¹ Pope Leo had no choice, but over the decades following Vatican II, and during the last pontificate in particular, the Catholic Church *has* had a choice. In preparation for writing this I came

¹ <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/bishop-egan-avoid-the-sspx-and-attend-only-licit-traditional-masses> accessed 29, July 2026

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across an article in an on-line magazine called *Crisis*. It seems pretty balanced. The author – who is not an SSPX supporter - wrote:

‘We’ve been told for 13 years that our watchwords must be “mercy” and “dialogue” and “accompaniment,” yet when it comes to the Society (the SSPX), the Vatican watchwords seem to be “intolerance” and “judgement” and “condemnation.”’²

The publishing of *‘Fiducia Supplicans’* which seemed to question the Church’s teaching on human sexuality; *‘Traditionis Custodes’* which severely curtailed the Latin Mass, and the Synodal path, must have seemed like confirmation to the members of the SSPX that the Church had lost its way. Possibly, which is exactly why we need the voice of challenge of the SSPX within the Church, even if we do not always agree. A way must be found to heal the rift. Our faith demands it. An ‘O well’ is not good enough. It is not even a slightly acceptable response.

Now to our new Prime Minister, Andrew Burnham. I have read some bylines that announce him as Britain’s first Catholic Prime Minister since the Reformation. I have read how he was an altar boy. I have read how Catholic Social teaching helped form his politics from an early age. But he now stands for just about everything that is contrary to the Christian conscience. The Catholic Herald has an article titled: *‘The worst kind of Catholic politician.’*³ Speaking of Andy Burnham it says:

No one who supports legal abortion, same-sex marriage, assisted suicide, ... can, in any meaningful sense, be called a practising Catholic — not because the Church

has no room for sinners, but because these are not private failings, they are public, considered rejections of settled teaching.

This does not mean, of course, that he will not be a fine Prime Minister. It *does* mean that he will be the man that the world wants him to be, and not the man that Christ invited him to be at his Baptism.

Why do I mention him? Because the SSPX are excommunicated – justly – for a failure in fidelity, but they are undoubtedly desiring to be Catholic. Andy Burnham could most likely walk into a Catholic Church – as he does on occasion – , receive the Blessed Sacrament and walk away, with no regard for what he was doing, and no repentance in his life. And many inside the Church and outside would be satisfied that he was Catholic, just as they did with former US President Joe Biden who was equally selective in his faith. It seems to me that something is profoundly wrong with this state of affairs in the Church purchased with the price of Christ’s blood. We all need to think about it and pray about it and come to some point of decision. We need to ask Jesus to feed the people once more. The alternative is starvation in the wilderness.

² Eric Sammons, <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/the-sspxs-foundational-error> accessed 29 July 2026

³ <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/the-worst-kind-of-catholic-politician> accessed 28 Jul 2026