

UPDATE: THE CHURCH IN THE DESERT AFTER FRANCIS

May 2026

Introduction: This writing may be helpful to all those who have recognized that the course of the current pontificate not only deviates slightly from the Church's previous path, but in some respects, does so significantly that it can no longer be approved from the perspective of faith. Therefore, the Church is going through a fundamental crisis.

THE NEED OF THE FAITHFUL

Those reading the title of this writing for the first time might be surprised by the term "Church in the Desert." How should it be interpreted?

Although it is not a common concept, I consider it the most appropriate to describe the situation of those Catholics who, for reasons of faith, cannot or do not want to align themselves with the current leadership of the Church. In a sense, they have lost the home that had provided them with so much shelter and security until now.

Where should the faithful turn when they realize, for example, that the so-called "synodal process," initiated in the last pontificate and carried forward by Leo XIV, turns out to be a deviation from the path the Church had followed until now? Where can they turn when they realize that a "different spirit" is taking advantage of the current ecclesiastical hierarchy and is even being confused with the Holy Spirit? Are these faithful not in a spiritual desert, or are they about to enter one?

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC

I began to address this thorny issue when I observed that, during Francis' pontificate, the Church hierarchy was increasingly straying from the path¹. Although such deviations had occurred previously in the Church's practice, they had not been approved by its highest authority. The decisive turning point came with the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016). Four cardinals attempted to intervene to

¹ In May 2024, I wrote my first article on the "Church in the Desert":
<https://en.elijamission.net/blog-post/the-church-in-the-desert/>

prevent the Church from falling into this error. However, they received no response to the “dubia” they had raised.

As a result of this papal document, the possibility arose for Catholics living in a disordered relationship—that is, in a second union while still bound by a valid marriage—to receive Holy Communion. Previously, Cardinal Ratzinger, in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had unequivocally rejected this claim from a theological perspective². With Francis’ new approach, the Church’s position on the matter changed radically. Thus, for some of the faithful, “Amoris Laetitia” became the million-dollar question. Could they continue to trust an ecclesiastical hierarchy that contradicted what the Church had taught until then?

It soon became clear that this was not merely a one-off slip intended to address the issue of “divorced and remarried Catholics” from a flawed pastoral perspective. “Amoris Laetitia” was followed by other serious errors, which I have already described in the series on the “Five Wounds of the Church.”³ On essential matters of ecclesiastical doctrine and practice, a new path had been embarked upon, almost “officially.” By applying the discernment of spirits, it becomes readily apparent that this new line of thought is not in harmony with Sacred Scripture or with the Tradition of the Church throughout the centuries. Clearly, the aforementioned “distinct spirit” had acquired considerable influence over the Church hierarchy. It is not difficult to conclude that this must be a deception of Lucifer, who, in cooperation with the human spirit, has created this confusion and thus obscured the light of truth.

In this writing, I do not intend to repeat everything I have already said. Those interested in learning more about my perspective on the current situation of the Church can consult the various posts on my blog⁴. However, I felt it appropriate to update and revisit the topic of the “Church in the Desert,” since Francis’ successor has made it abundantly clear that he will continue the course set by his predecessor, and indeed, he is doing so⁵.

² In 1993, three German bishops (including Cardinal Kasper) published a pastoral letter proposing that 'divorced and remarried' people be allowed to receive Holy Communion. This proposal was rejected by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which responded by publishing a letter to all bishops clarifying the issue:

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_14091994_rec-holy-comm-by-divorced_en.html

³ <https://en.elijamission.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-5-Wounds-of-the-Church.pdf>

⁴ https://en.elijamission.net/blog_post/

⁵ In his address to the College of Cardinals on May 10, 2025, just two days after his election, Leo XIV stated: *“In this regard, I would like us to renew together today our complete commitment to the path that*

WHAT IS THE “CHURCH IN THE DESERT”?

The “Church in the Desert,” which could also be called the “Underground Church” or the “Church in the Catacombs,” is by no means a new or different Church. Nor is it a particular community or foundation. Rather, it refers to those faithful of the Catholic Church who find it necessary to withdraw to the desert for a time to preserve the treasures of the Bride of Christ and her holy faith. Those who have noticed and concluded that the current ecclesiastical hierarchy is headed toward apostasy belong to this “Church in the desert.” They have recognized that this crisis represents a state of emergency.

If the ministers of the hierarchy itself follow this new course and do not publicly oppose it, they lose the spiritual authority inherent in the exercise of their ministry. Therefore, they cannot expect any obedience from the faithful. This eminent and precious virtue cannot be granted to those who contradict the doctrine and practice of the Church and persist in this error. In fact, one can even go so far as to abuse a high office to spread erroneous doctrines and practices.

This last observation is crucial for understanding the need for the “Church in the desert.” It leads, consequently, to a conscious distancing from the current hierarchy, which, under the influence of an anti-Christian spirit, fails to realize that it has thrown wide open the doors to the pernicious modernism about which the popes prior to the Second Vatican Council had so vehemently warned. A Church that adapts to the spirit of the world and no longer corrects it or fulfills its pastoral role increasingly loses the identity God has bestowed upon it.

SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE AND LIFE IN THE DESERT

The faithful will have to remain in this desert for a time and will only be able to collaborate in the long term with those clergy who cling to Church doctrine and who, for their part, have clearly distanced themselves from the deviations of the current hierarchy. The clergy will be responsible for administering the sacraments and helping

the universal Church has now followed for decades in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis masterfully and concretely set it forth.”

(<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250510-collegio-cardinalizio.html>)

The confusing appointments of bishops and other church offices reveal the path he intends to follow. Similarly, Pope Leo XIV’s emphasis on a ‘synodal Church’ and his support for the ‘synodal process’ initiated by Pope Francis point clearly in a specific direction.

them lead a coherent spiritual life. This can happen in so-called “Eucharistic Houses,” as in the time of the Cristeros in Mexico or when Catholics in England were forced to practice their faith in secret due to Anglican persecution. There will be hidden places, perhaps even private churches and chapels, that will serve this purpose.

It is to be hoped that an increasing number of priests—and, God willing, bishops as well—will grasp the full tragic dimension of this emergency, draw the appropriate conclusions, and serve the faithful in secret, so that the “little flock” may be sustained by their ministry.

Given the recognition that the current hierarchy has taken a pernicious and dangerous course, a spiritual resistance must be formed. Prayer, the path of holiness, sacrifices in secret, the unequivocal proclamation of the Church’s doctrine without false concessions, fidelity to the treasure that has been handed down to us, and finally, the worthy celebration of Holy Mass, without trivialization or desacralization, are spiritual weapons to which we must resort.

Thus, the Church can remain under God’s active guidance, even if for a time she is deprived of the direction from the hierarchy instituted by the Lord. May many faithful recognize that the path to the desert, in one way or another, is the appropriate response in these times of emergency! May God grant them the strength to be willing to suffer persecution and rejection rather than cooperate with a wrong path and deny the Lord in any way!

Contact:

ecclesiaindeserto@elijamission.net