

From: A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery

Kilmer Myers was the vicar of Saint Augustine's on the Lower East Side of Manhattan from 1952 to 1960. He became famous for his work with street gangs. His book, *Light the Dark Streets*, is the story of the parish's engagement with the Knights. As Father Myers tells the "Saint Augustine's—Knights" story, he also shows the reader something of the common life of the parish. A common life that had the mix of factors that not only made the gang work possible, but filled that work with sanctifying grace. It was an illustration of Evelyn Underhill's insight that our service will only be "right" if it is grounded in adoration and awe. The factors present in

Father Myer's parish of the 1950s are the same factors needed in any parish that is to be a community of love rooted in a common prayer of adoration and awe. This book is an exploration of those elements and dynamics. Our starting place is what is organic in the inner life of any parish church. To effectively and faithfully shape the parish, the work needs to be grounded in an understanding of the natural functioning of the body of Christ; in the inherent functioning of that microcosm called the parish church. The need is to shift our focus to the organic reality of the parish—we gather and we scatter, we are renewed and we go forth into our apostolate. It just happens.

As Evelyn Underhill put it, "You are to be taken, consecrated, broken, and made a means of grace; vehicles of the Eternal Charity." In our pastoral strategy, we want to pay attention to the natural organic rhythms and dynamics of the parish church. Once we have some understanding of that, we might better shape the parish in ways that align with those rhythms. This requires a shift of focus from the institutional functioning of the church to the organic functioning of the body of Christ.

Heyne, Michelle; Gallagher, Robert A.. *A Wonderful and Sacred Mystery: A Practical Theology of the Parish Church*, Ascension Press of the Order of the Ascension, 2021