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Young: Religious leaders "diss" the faithful

By **Peter B. Young**/ Local Columnist

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"Dissed" is a useful word that comes directly to us from the minority youngsters who swarm the mean streets of our inner cities. In its various permutations, the word means that possibly you "disrespect" somebody. As in, "Are you 'dissing' me, man?" Or, perhaps even more ominously, "Don't 'diss' me, man."

I've been recalling that useful word in recent days, as I contemplate the clerical custodians of two great faiths "dissing" their own laity. One of those great faiths, Catholicism, is headquartered in the Holy City of Rome; the other great faith (Islam) is based in Saudi Arabia which, at this very moment, is hosting millions of their faithful believers on the dramatic hajj, or pilgrimage to the holy cities of Medina and Mecca.

Just this past Sunday, this very newspaper reported that Vatican authorities had rejected appeals from several local parishes that had challenged the rulings of the Boston diocese that the time had come for them to close down their buildings and services permanently.

But what really got my attention was that one of the parishoners at St. Jeremiah's Church in Framingham, Mary Beth Carmody, still on vigil at the church there after all these months, told reporter Jen Kavanaugh: "We're very disappointed that the first notice we received of the closing is from the press."

Carmody continued: "The archdiocese has my numbers. They did not give us the courtesy of a phone call."

How naive of you, Ms. Carmody. The robed men of Rome regard you as a child on these and all other related matters. For your own good, and provided you do as you are told, these robed men will guard you from the temptations of sin and eventually usher you into Heaven. Meanwhile, leave your vigil and go to your room. Consider yourself "dissed."

But if you think that's a little rough, and it is, consider what happened last week to more than 360 Muslim faithful on pilgrimage (hajj) to their holy sites in Saudi Arabia. Those faithful pilgrims died; that's what happened to them. They died, and a thousand more were seriously injured in a massive crowd stampede, as tens of thousands of pilgrims rushed to perform the cleansing ritual of hurling stones at the Devil.

This tragedy was made all the more inexcusable by the grim fact that similar disasters had occurred at least twice in recent years during the hajj. In 1990, 1,400 pilgrims were killed in a crowd stampede at the same "stoning" site. And in 2004, 245 pilgrims were fatally injured.

But, you may well ask, what possible concern should I have for those many Catholic laity, who are "dissed" daily by their spiritual guardians? And why should I trouble myself with the fate of those Muslims under the lash of Saudi princes, the appointed guardians of their faith?

To take the Catholic laity on vigil at St. Jeremiah's: I know some of them; I believe them to be representative of what is best in the larger, world parish of their church. Those in the Vatican power structure, who would "diss" their own faithful laity, should look into the mirror instead.

As for the Muslims on their required pilgrimage, I have known some of them over the years. For them, the hajj is a way of life. I believe them to be far better than the millionaire Saudi princes, who "diss" them (and us) to an extent that can only cause us to wonder. Wonder what, you ask?

Oh, I sometimes wonder whether the Saudi princes are the appropriate people to control not only the faith and faithful of Islam, but also the largest concentration of

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liquid black gold (oil) in the world. And, increasingly, the answer I come up with is simply: No, they are not appropriate for that critical responsibility.

Do I "diss" those Saudi princes with that kind of conclusion? Perhaps. But, then again, perhaps they deserve it. Just ask those Muslim pilgrims at the stoning site this year!

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