

THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PASTOR: We Are All Hurting

As I reflected a couple of weeks ago in my homily on the current abuse scandals, we are in a difficult time in the Catholic Church as we face the latest reality of evil in our world: a world that we as Christians are not immune from, as our Lord warned many times during His ministry 2000 years ago. The revelations of the last few weeks are another “wake-up call” that the battle between good and evil is a real one; that sin is real; that the pursuit of holiness is not easy; that Satan does exist; and that the evil one will try to do anything to undermine the mission of the Church to bring souls to Christ. Because the Church, and the Eucharist, and the priests who confect the Eucharist, and the laity who exercise their mission to evangelize the culture, are all such essential avenues to Heaven, Satan will try all he can to attack at the heart of God’s work on this Earth.

Indeed, Satan has attacked. **But we must not succumb. We must rally all the more around the source of our strength: the Lord Jesus Christ.** And as we do so, especially in the Holy Eucharist and in our personal and collective prayer, we can and must be honest with Jesus about our reactions, our feelings, our questions, our frustrations, our anger at the fallout of Satan’s attack. Indeed, as a pastor and as a Christian, I have many of my own, as I ponder the recent crisis. The recent events hit home for me as a pastor in that they painfully remind me of some past experiences of how broken our culture is with its confusion over sexuality and the dignity of the human person. I have personally, in my past ten years as pastor of multiple parishes, had to handle no less than half a dozen instances of inappropriate behavior (or accusations thereof) involving parishioners, staff, or even (in one instance) a visiting contractor to a parish. Handling these cases immediately and firmly was never easy for me, but it was essential to protect those in my pastoral care. These cases confronted me with the reality of the work that needs to be done in our larger culture regarding restoring a healthy understanding of sexuality and human dignity.

So, as I look at the current crisis in the Church, as a priest who has had to deal with these issues, as a disciple of the Lord myself, and as a “second-career” who has worked in private-sector organizations, I am wrestling, too, with many questions and frustrations about our hierarchy. While most bishops are good leaders, why didn’t more exercise the strong leadership and the “fraternal correction” that they should have? Why weren’t appropriate procedures put into place back in 2002 (during the “first” scandal) to handle cases against bishops, as were put into place against deacons and priests? And so on. It’s important that, as we come to Jesus for refuge and strength after being hurt in the spiritual battle against Satan, **that we are honest with our questions, individually and collectively, and to support each other in that we are not alone, and to keep focused on our overall mission of discipleship and evangelization.**

There are some reasons for hope, to keep us from despair. It seems as though, finally, more of our bishops are “getting it”. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the current head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has courageously called for investigations into the very questions I raised above, which no doubt will be discussed at the annual November meeting of our nation’s bishops. Our bishops need our prayers as more learn the meaning of leadership.

But we need more than just the hierarchy to take action and to get on the ball. **We need the ENTIRE Church to join in the battle against Satan and to take action as we come to Jesus for healing and strength: as lay women, as lay men, as parents, as parishioners.** There are some positive initiatives underway and resources available to help. I encourage, for example, all **lay women** to voice their concerns with the thousands of others by co-signing the letter to Pope Francis at catholicwomensforum.org. **Men, we need you as well** to call our hierarchy to strong, manly leadership. Voice your concerns and join in the fasting that other lay men are committing to, by co-signing a similar letter to Pope Francis at catholicmenunited.org. For **parents and all parishioners**, there are a number of helpful resources and guides to try to deal with the current crisis (from popular speakers like Bishop Barron, Fr. Mike Schmitz, and lay Catholics) that will soon be listed on the home page of the Diocese of Columbus. Check them out. One of them is especially well-done, and I have reprinted it here in today’s bulletin. **And finally**, in the spiritual battle against evil, we all need to heed the call for **intense prayer and fasting** in the weeks and months ahead that Pope Francis is urging.

Together, let’s not give up, but no matter how difficult the battle against evil and Satan gets, let’s stay focused on Jesus Christ, and remain confident that He is, and always will be, the Victor! St. Michael the Archangel, Pray for Us!