

A number of you urged me to speak to the horrible scandal that is rocking the Church. In some sense, the story first broke in 2002, but there just seems to be more and more that comes to the surface. I indirectly addressed the scandal two weeks ago, hoping it would be adequate. However, I know I need to speak more directly to the issue. Frankly, I'm still struggling to work through this spiritually and emotionally myself. Scandal even shakes us amongst the clergy, believe it or not. At times, I've felt deeply angry, hopefully not sinfully so. At times, deeply discouraged, hopefully not sinfully so.

Cardinal McCarrick, a leader in implementing the Dallas charter of all things, has had some very serious credible accusations made against him, accusations of unlawful homosexual behavior against minors, seminarians even. And now it has come to my attention that the Pope made an episcopal appointment in 2015 in Chile showing very questionable, even a scandalous lack of judgement. He made the appointment after receiving a letter from an alleged victim, hand delivered, revealing credible accusations against Bishop Juan Barros before his appointment. The Pope appointed him anyway. So we have that issue, at the very top, to work through. And

there is a lot more in the Dioceses of Pennsylvania, the weeds of which I don't need to get into right now.

A priest friend I haven't seen since I was ordained 23 years ago, visited this past week. It was great to see him again. We picked up right where we left off.

However, he shared a rather sobering story. He told me of a man who approached a priest, a man who didn't know the priest at all, there were total strangers, and he beat him to within inches of his life. That is how much anger is out there over this scandal.

A member of my own family, surprised me the same week. He suggested I not wear my clerics in public for my own safety and for one of the first times questioned the wisdom of a celibate priesthood, whether it is wise considering that 4/5ths of the crimes against minors by clergy are of a homosexual nature. My priest friend pondered, "How long before we have bricks thrown through our windows?" On a happier note, when we were out for dinner, our waitress came up and said a lady who had just left the restaurant, had paid our bill. We looked at one another with a bit of shock to tell you the truth, and gratitude... but I felt strangely embarrassed,

like I should have run after her, insisting on paying for my own meal and hers!

So where do we go from here? How do we process all this? Let me share **a few thoughts**. **First**, a Scripture passage comes to mind: (Lk 12:2) There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops.

On the one hand, I find this consoling. I think we all should. I find it consoling because crimes of abuse by people in places of authority will not remain hidden. As much as one might try, it will all come out in the open, either in this life, or worse yet, in the end during the final judgement. It will all come out, and there will be justice. If we can take that to heart, I think we will be freed from the temptation toward violence, and the temptation to just walk away from Jesus and from his mystical body, the Church.

On the other hand, I find it scary. I think we all should. This means all our sins will be brought in the open, either in this life or the next. People will see us for who we are,

both the good and the bad. *So let's fight the power of scandal by working harder to be the holiest Christians we can be.* We must do our part to bring about honesty, openness and integrity, especially from our Church leaders, but let's remember that our first responsibility is to make sure we are pursuing complete integrity in ourselves on every level. For as is written in the Book of Leviticus over and over, "Be Holy as I the Lord your God am holy." And as our Lord said in Lk 16:10 "The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones."

Basing myself on this prophesy that all will come into the open, the second thing I wish to do is call all Christians to be courageous. This means the alleged victims and the alleged victimizers need to come out into the open. People have a right to know their accuser and the accused have the duty to be open and honest. It is the only path to healing. The desire for secrecy on both sides needs to end. Almost without exception, I think this has not helped the situation. Scandal will come, but attempts to keep it quiet only make it worse.

Let me now speak to the discouragement some of you may be experiencing. I find St. Peter's words very consoling from today's Gospel: **Master, to whom shall we go? [For] You have the words of eternal life.** St. Peter was in fact saying, "I don't know what to make of it all, I just know I can't let it get in the way of my relationship with you Lord, or with my relationship with your mystical body the Church, with my brothers and sisters in Christ."

The Lord watched many people leave him after his teaching about the true presence, that we eat his body and drink his blood in Holy Communion. And so he asked St. Peter, and he asks us all, "Will you leave me too?"

Jesus knew many would also leave him because of the demanding nature of his moral teachings, moral teachings that can be summed up by those glorious words found in the Book of Leviticus: Be Holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy!

But he also knew many would leave him because of scandal in the Church, caused by those who profess themselves to be disciples, but who in fact are not much more than weeds amongst the wheat, or wolves in

sheep's clothing. And so today he is saying to us, "Will you leave me too?"

In Mt 18:6ff Jesus says, "Whoever causes scandal to one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come!"

I never thought I would experience this, but now I find it consoling that one of the Apostles, one of these who ranked higher than our Popes, betrayed Jesus. In regard to him, Jesus went so far as to say, Mt 26:24 "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

Perhaps, in God's providence, this was to prepare us for these days of trial. It happened right from the start.

So I encourage all of you, to have courage. And you have a right to your anger and discouragement.

But be careful of the anger and discouragement, which is not according to reason as St. Thomas Aquinas would put it, **of the anger and despair which is not of God.** These are great traps laid by the Evil one, may God rebuke him, we humbly pray.

And for all of us clergy, who have betrayed our people, may God rebuke us, I humbly pray. May we repent, and if need be, may we be removed from ministry.

One final thought, these days and these trials are a call for all of us to renew our practice of prayer and fasting.

I think of the Gospel of Mark chapter 9. There was a demon the disciples could not drive out. So they brought the man to Jesus and he drove it out. Afterwards, downcast, the disciples asked why they could not drive the demon out. Jesus responded, **“This kind can only be driven out with prayer and fasting.”**

We are dealing with the same kind of demon, perhaps not just figuratively, but literally speaking. As we demand Justice and seek the gift of peace, let each of us embrace prayer and better incorporate fasting into our spiritual lives. If we do these things, I’m convinced healing will come.

And let us never forget the Lord’s promise: (Mt 16:18) The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against my Church. And also his words in Mt 10:22, “Whoever endures to the end will be saved.”

