

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time Bb

It's hard to be a Catholic today. With the terrible situation that has unfolded in Pennsylvania these past weeks regarding the abuse of children by the clergy is beyond comprehension and understanding – “How can people who were trusted and tasked to take care of the vulnerable could do this horrific crime to children and the innocent? There is a deep feeling of discouragement, hurt, betrayal, and anger that these atrocities have brought to so many people. It is even hard to look up to the Church and our leaders today – the misuse of authority by some leadership to cover up for these crimes stains the trust and the faith of so many people in the Church that Jesus called His Body. So in behalf of the church, I would like to say sorry for the hurt, the pain, the discouragement, betrayal and disillusionment that this horrific scandal has brought to you and to so many people especially the victims and their families. Yes, it is also hard to be a priest today. People thinking of you with malice are disheartening for someone trying to live his vocation with the best that he can. Just this week, someone called me at the office and told me that I am a devil and all priests should go to hell. I clearly understand the anger and the negative reactions people have because of the gravity of what had happened. But honestly, it is still painful to hear those words but I don't think that my pain is as deep and as painful as what the victims and their families have to experience and endure from the hands of their abusers. So my heart truly goes out to them, our hearts must go out to them. I know that no amount of civil justice can ever make them whole again. And so we put our trust in God to bring them healing, justice, comfort and peace in their lives.

In this difficult and tough time, it is very human for us to get discouraged and give up – it is very tempting for us to just raise our hands and surrender – to think of leaving and running away to face this storm before us. It came into my mind and I think it did come to some of you as well. Just like what happened in our gospel today where many followers of Jesus went away and left Him because they cannot accept what Jesus was proclaiming about the Eucharist. I know that we cannot truly compare their situation to ours – what we have today is truly unacceptable; way, way beyond what the followers of Jesus rejected. What they wrongfully rejected

then was a true teaching of Jesus but what is before us is a horrific crime that we truly need to reject and condemn in our lives. So it is understandable for people, yes, for us to get discouraged, to get angry, to get disillusioned, to feel like leaving.... Not to care anymore. But it is in this moment that Jesus comes to us, asking us: "Do you also want to leave?"

Remember in the Gospel that Jesus didn't offer some kind of watered down explanation of the Eucharist in order to convince them to stick around. He simply asks them: "Do you also want to leave?" In that moment of crisis, the Twelve didn't understand, rationally speaking, the mysterious doctrine of the Eucharist any more completely than everybody else. So why did they continue to follow the Lord? Because they trusted in him, in his person. They put more faith in the person of Jesus Christ, the Lord, than in their own limited ability to understand God. By consciously exercising their faith in the midst of that crisis, and not just depending on their own limited understanding, they lifted their spiritual maturity to a whole new level.

It is also in our moment of crisis today that I encourage you to put your trust and faith in the person of Jesus our Lord. Let us trust Him to take care of us, His people, His children, His Church, His Body. Yes, we are broken people. We are all sinners. But Jesus is there to make us whole, to heal us and lift us up. Let us not use our brokenness, our weakness, our sinfulness to discourage and hurt people but inspire us instead to work harder and persevere to become better our lives, to be Christ's instrument of peace and love in the world, to be His witnesses, His hands and feet here on earth.

Fr. Mike Schmitz, a notable preacher and speaker, in response to what's happening in the Church today said: "Don't leave the Church when things are tough, lead the Church when things are tough." We are all part of the Body of Christ. When one suffers, everyone suffers. We need to come together to heal, to protect, and to lift each other up as the Body of Christ. Yes, we need to be vigilant in taking care of our children and youth. We need to be transparent in handling cases of abuse. We need to be there for each other to help those who are abuse in any way. We need to stand up. We need to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

Since this dark stain in the Church has been put into the light, the Church has put policies and protocols to prevent this from happening and to hold people accountable. We have the Dallas Charter. Here in our Archdiocese, we have the Called to Protect program. We background check everyone who works with children and the youth. We have yearly trainings for our volunteers and staff about it. I know that the Church still has to do more to protect our children and youth. But I believe that these policies and protocols will not be enough and will never be enough if we don't live what the Gospel is asking us to do. We need to be uncompromising with our faith, clergy and lay people alike. We need to be uncompromising against evil. We truly need to live what the Gospel tells us to do. As such, let us reflect and ask ourselves: "Where is in my life there is corruption?" "Where is in my life that sin has a hold of me?" Let us cut it off. God needs uncompromising people of faith, people who are courageous, people who are faithful, people who are committed, people who are persevering in their life.

So today, let us come to the Lord and offer to Him our life, our challenges and our faith. Let us put our trust in Him to heal us, to make us whole, to lift us up. Let us also offer to him all the victims of abuse especially by the clergy and their families so that God may heal them, give them justice and peace in their lives. Amen.