

THE SINS OF OUR CHURCH'S LEADERS (Revisited)

My friends, as you know there was a Statewide Grand Jury report released last Tuesday. You cannot begin to read it without beginning to cry. I have preached on this reality a good number of times. It is so hard to do. There are no excuses. There can be no excuses. Evil is evil and especially so where, above all, we expect to find holiness, care and truth. Evil must be recognized, named and dealt with whenever we encounter it. We cannot run from it nor try to hide it because we are ashamed. It must be faced, addressed and eliminated.

Allow me to quote our Archbishop, from his column this week:

“This has been an ugly week: first for those who have survived sexual abuse; second, for the Catholics of our Commonwealth; third, for the wider public. For many, rage is the emotion of choice. The latest Grand Jury report is a bitterly painful text.... The anger that Jesus showed toward the Temple money-changers, the Sadducees, the Pharisees was not merely acceptable but right and good. The anger Philadelphians felt toward the Archdiocese after the 2005 and 2011 Grand Jury reports was likewise well-placed and justified.”

He goes on to say that since then and slowly the bishops and the priests who remain here have been making efforts to ensure the safety of our children and to make sure none of this happens again. That is our responsibility before God. ***“We know that rebuilding the trust of our people and the morale of the good priests (let us pray for the morale of all of us to be healed) can only be accomplished with a record of doing the right thing over time.”***

My friends it is very clear to me—again—as it is to you that some of our priests have committed crimes and sacrileges especially against our children. They have violated their vows and lived a deception, and preyed on the littlest in our midst. It is clear to me again that some of our bishops have failed to deal responsibly and care for those violated and sinned against, but chose to ensure the reputation of the Church. What a lie. There is so much of this in that Grand Jury report. I have read until I couldn't read anymore. Just like the last two times. It makes me sick. It makes me angry. It raises in me a desire to strike back somehow and to make things right again. How can we do this? I know that personally I can think of six different times when I have been approached by parishioners or others who reported sexual or physical abuse. In each case I listened, in each case I tried to counsel and encourage the person to report this abuse to the Archdiocesan authorities and in most cases that is precisely what they did.

I have been reading a lot, praying a lot, thinking a lot. I do believe that our Archbishop has been doing a great deal, often behind the scenes, to address the healing that is needed. Not just for those victimized themselves but often for their families and loved ones too. He is not a perfect bishop but I believe he is one of the bishops who gets it. He is no “wink-wink” bishop who is all *bella figura* on the outside but dead man's bones on the inside. He cares and he helps. And he does not worry about his reputation. One million seven hundred thousand dollars last year alone was dispensed to those so abused by our priests to help them with the needed

counselling and training and support and financial assistance they have a right to. That the abuse occurred long ago is of little comfort to those who were so used and whose pain is so real.

The Archbishop did make this following point in the letter in the Paduan today. Since 2005 until today there have been less than a half dozen allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by a member of the clergy received in the Archdiocese, less than 6 allegations in the last fourteen years. All have been reported to law enforcement for investigation. Only one allegation has been substantiated in that time. That priest was removed from ministry by the Archbishop and was later convicted of Federal child pornography charges and is doing time.

During that same time over 100,000 parishioners have undergone Safe Environment Training and Mandatory Reporter Training to help them recognize, respond to and report suspected child sexual abuse. These things are a beginning. But only that. Abusing priests and covering-up bishops are part of a larger societal problem that is finally being addressed. Sexual abuse has infiltrated every aspect of our society and family life. And our Church in whose bosom some of that actually happened now must try to repair what other members did. But wherever such abuse has taken place those guilty must pay the penalty and those who covered up must pay the price as well. No matter the venue.

You know, I was thinking. The members of that Grand Jury were all ordinary folk—lay people. They got it right. Many of them were Catholics. They want this kind of crap out of our church. They are right. We want that too. I believe that what is happening not only in our Church but in our culture is a process of purification that originates in the God of Truth. He wants to restore our Church to its original innocence and our land to our original destiny. God is using whatever is at hand to accomplish this purification.

It is for you and me, priest and lay people who remain and have not given up on our Church or our faith, who have chosen to stay and who believe that Jesus is the Lord and the Bread of Life which alone sustains, to bring about the purification. How? By doubling down on our own faithfulness to our calling as true disciples of Our Lord. To act in such a way as to be channels of God's grace once again into the Church. To make the sacrifices. To take on acts of reparation even though we did not do the sinning. To increase our prayer because we love our Lord and our faith and we want the salve of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon all the little ones who were broken by their parish priests and diocesan bishops. **We** have to make reparations for those sacrilegious actions of our clergy that violated our people and the very Body of Christ.

We should know that we have not yet reached the high water mark on these scandals. That is still to come. And know this too. There will be heads that fall both in the Church and in our world because of the way all of this was or was not handled appropriately. This is not human endeavor. This purification originates in the Father who sends the little ones to us. He is the One who can neither deceive nor be deceived.