

My parishioners are calling me and asking, "Fr., What's going on in the Church?" This is my response and encouragement to them.

The news of the grand jury report that bishops and other Catholic Church leaders in Pennsylvania covered up more than 300 priests abuse of 1,000 children over a period of 70 years, and the alleged cover up and ignoring of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick sexual misconducts by the Vatican brings back painful memories of such reports in the past and has, once again, shaken the Catholic Church to its very foundation. Catholics and Non-Catholics are feeling and expressing disappointment, shame, dismay, disbelief, concern, worry, anger, rage, confusion, let downs and betrayals by the leadership of the Church. This is one of those times Catholics are not proud Catholics. I regard the incidents as a fresh piercing of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is bleeding once more.

What we are experiencing is a fulfilment of the Scripture. "The experts of the law did not know me; the shepherds rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied in the name of Baal, and went after useless idols. So, I must put you on trial once more – it is the Lord who speaks" (Jeremiah 2:8-9). "For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17).

The castigation, disparaging, deriding, mockery, ridiculing, scorning and criticism the Church is receiving from the media and from every corner is also a fulfilment of the Scripture, "You are salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste ... [it] is thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Matthew 5:13). Every tree that bears rotten fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:19). "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42). These passages explain why the Church is under fire and the calls for resignations and prosecutions.

However, I find Mark 8:35-40 very encouraging at this time. "On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, 'Let us cross to the other side.' Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Quiet! Be still!' The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, 'Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?'" Let our faith sustain us. Jesus knows how to calm the troubled sea.

The Catholic Church has survived till today despite various phases of difficulties because it was founded by Jesus Christ. Jesus prophesied to Peter while he (Jesus) was founding the Church, "I say to you ... upon this rock I will build my church, the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus promised his apostles, "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The hierarchy is not the Church. Christ is the head of the Church and we are the body. Even if the hierarchy strays, Christ remains the head and we remain the body. I am not a Catholic Christian because of the pope or the bishop or the priest or the nun. I am a Catholic Christian because I am a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of the Church he established. I am a Catholic Christian because I look upon Jesus, the author and

finisher of my faith (Hebrews 12:2). I am a Catholic Christian because Jesus loves me and paid a supreme price for me (Galatians 3:13). Kristine Franklin says, "I am not a Catholic because of the holiness of laypeople, priests, bishops and pope. I am a Catholic because the Church is True. That some choose not to pursue holiness does not move me to love the Church less."

St. Ignatius taught his disciples to see God in all things. This teaching is according to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." I, strongly, believe that God has a plan by means of the Pennsylvania's grand jury report and the allegations by Archbishop Maria Vigano against the Church leadership. Let us wait in prayer for God's divine plan. God speaks to us through the psalmist, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

The crimes committed by the predatory priests and the cover ups are inexcusable, but let us be encouraged that hundreds of thousands of priests all over the world are living life of sacrifice and working with dedication in the vineyard of the Lord. The civilization and contributions of the Catholic Church to the world in every facet of human existence should not be thrown overboard because of the sins of some priests and some bishops. Many countries, communities and people are what they are today because of what they benefited from the Catholic Church.

The Evil One cashes in on moments of distress like this to propagate discouragement and discord. But thanks be to God for our faith. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). The sins of human beings will not make us walk away from Christ Jesus, and his body, the Church. We proclaim with St. Peter, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69).

May we and the Catholic Church be healed by the wound and blood of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

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