

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
August 26, 2018

Many of Jesus' disciples were listening and said "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this and said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?" As a result of this, many of His disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus said to the Twelve. "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered Him, "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." "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" "Do you also want to leave?" "We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

The Church was born in scandal. The scandal of the rejection of Jesus by the leaders and the people. The scandal that one of his closest followers, Judas, would choose 30 pieces of silver over Jesus. The scandal that the one Jesus chose as head of the Church, Peter, denied knowing Him 3 times when it got tough and the other apostles except one ran and hid. The scandal that Jesus was executed on the cross which was only done to major criminals who were murderers or traitors to the state. The scandal that we have in our Gospel today that Jesus said that we have to eat his flesh and drink His blood if we are to be His followers which caused many to leave. The Eucharist was a scandal to the pagan Romans that literally caused 300 years of persecution of the members of the church by imprisonment, torture, and violent deaths unless they renounced their faith and walked away from Jesus. Scandal and human frailty and criticism are hard to endure, it shakes a person's faith, but we see that even in the midst of scandal there are people of great faith. Great saints whom God raises up in times of trial, who instead of saying these sayings we are hearing are hard, say when asked by Jesus "Do you also want to leave?" "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."

We have been exposed to tough sayings about clergy sex abuse, about the role of Bishops, about those who suffered from abuse and what they are suffering, about human frailty and sinners in the church and it makes people want to question, do I want to stay here or should I walk away like the crowd did in the Gospel? Scandal is hard. The things that abused people have gone through that has changed their life is real. The shaking of trust and confidence in the Church, in the Bishops and priests is real. It needs to be acknowledged. Where do we go from here? Where do I go? What should I do? It becomes a time to examine our faith. Often we just float along with it Sunday by Sunday and take it for granted. But at times there is a crisis in our lives that gives us a challenge, will I follow the sinners or will this inspire me all the more to live my life for Jesus and become a saint by actively and openly living His healing, mercy and love.

What can I say about it? The facts are real but many are old facts made known nearly 20 years ago just repeated from a new source. I remember back around 2003 when this first came out, I was afraid to wear my clerical collar out in public for fear I would be spit on and beaten up. The people were angry as hell and rightfully so at the Bishops and priests. But what did I hear as they complained. "Thank God for our priest who is not like that." And I found great support. We need to put things into perspective yes there were hundreds of priests who abused, but thousands who did their best to live holy lives and kept their vows of celibacy and virginity so they could serve their people like Jesus did. I am thankful for all the priests I know who struggled against temptation and sought God's grace to remain faithful so they could bring Jesus to their people. The devil hates priests and bishops as he knows they are ordained to be Jesus and bring Jesus to their people and often they face harder temptations than other men. That is why Priests have 2 guardian angels to help them remain faithful.

Does it bother me when I hear of unfaithful priests who have abused? Yes it does. I am ashamed by what they did, but like Jesus I pray for those they abused and I pray for them that they may like an alcoholic, drug addict or any addict after falling on their face that they have the grace to repent and change their lives as I know Jesus did not come and die for saints but for sinners. The priest that was my inspiration to be a priest whom I held in high regard and whose homilies that I heard as a child I would quote back to him when I saw him when he was dying, after he

died it was revealed that he abused altar boys. I was shocked by it, but I am still thankful for the good that he did even though he was a sinner and I pray for the repose of his soul and for those he abused. Did I believe it when I heard of the abuse by him for the first time? No, as that thankfully was not my experience, but I did believe later when I got to know some of the men who were abused and they told me their tragic stories. But I am still thankful for the blessings that came through him as a priest to me as he gave me my first communion, a love for the Mass and prepared me for confirmation and inspired me to be a priest. It is bitter – sweet. The human frailty of the man is bitter, but the blessings that came through him as a Priest who was Christ in our parish which I treasure to this day in my priesthood.

Does it bother me that the Bishops did not do what we think they should have done now? That is the problem is that we judge them for not doing in the past things that were not known then – but by we know now as facts. I am not going to judge the bishops because I know many tried to do then what were best practices at the time. Yes some did move priests around. But if you came to me today to confession and said that you were committing adultery with someone at work. I would tell you to move, to get away from the person who is the temptation for you, go on retreat and pray to seek the grace you need and do penance for your sin. That is what the Bishops did. Was it enough to help the abused, no not by any means but it got the priest out of the picture. Then later psychology, a new science offered hope and the abusers were sent away for treatment and the psychologists said they are cured and safe to return to ministry and they were returned their parishes. But then it was later learned by psychologists, when it was too late, that you can never be cured as they abused again. The church was criticized that they should be kicked out and so they were and became laymen and then the church was then criticized because they were now out in the public and should have been in jail. The bishops did what they could with what was known at the time but not what is known now as it was unknown then. The bishops need a lot of prayers to have the wisdom to know how to handle difficult situations. They need our support.

Does it bother me that people were abused? Yes it does. Do I know what it is like to be sexually abused? No I don't. But I do know what it is like to be emotionally abused, to have panic attacks, to have post traumatic stress syndrome - and also the need to forgive the abusers or else you carry the abuse with you wherever you go waiting for vengeance. "Vengeance is mine says the Lord and I will repay." No, we need to forgive others as we want to be forgiven so can move on with our lives. We need to make the bad experience and its wounds a way of understanding and being a healer to others, so they can experience God's love. We are all sinners and are wounded and we all are called to be wounded healers with whatever experiences we have gone through.

Are the seminaries places where there is a homosexual subculture? I don't know about today but I attended 3 seminaries, Nazareth Hall Minor Seminary, St. John Vianney College Seminary and St. Paul Major Seminary and I never saw a homosexual subculture and if any were suspected of being homosexual, even though they were not acting out, they were asked to leave. That is my experience and that is all I can speak of. The problem is that our society since the sexual revolution in the 60's says any type of sex with anyone should be permitted and legal. Laws were removed against adultery, fornication and homosexual acts. Now the next step planned is to remove laws on pedophilia saying "Children deserve sexual experiences from experienced adults!" Isn't that exactly what the outcry is against!!! Our anger should help us to speak up against that opinion by people in the media and politics.

So again there is scandal and we need to make a choice. Jesus asks, "Are you also going to leave me?" Can we say like Peter because we are thankful for the thousands of faithful priests and bishops who have brought us Jesus and His blessings, "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." And so, am I ashamed to be a Catholic? No, I am proud to be a Catholic, the church founded by Jesus himself to save sinners. Am I ashamed to be a priest? No, I am humbled and honored that Jesus and Bishop Schladweiler chose me to be a priest to bring God's blessings to the parishioners in the past and to you today. I have made my choice, not to leave Peter because of Judas, now you make yours.