

Fr. Mike Jendrek's homily for Sunday, September 2, 2018

Today I am going to speak about the recent revelations concerning our church. I recognize that we have children in our congregation today. Given the subject, you as a parent can choose to take your young children for a walk for about 15 minutes and come back to join us for the Eucharist. If you would like, I will provide you a written copy of my homily.

Often, in preparing a homily I search for a story which relates to the readings of the Mass, which relate to the word of God, spoken to us. Today's story, a true story, has been told to us in the last several weeks; the true story of former Archbishop McCarrick sexually abusing a child for many years; Archbishop McCarrick sexually abusing seminarians and young priests; and then bishops making financial payments with non-disclosure agreements to keep secret what McCarrick did.

Second; there was the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report which documented 70 years of sexual abuse in six Pennsylvanian dioceses done by mainly priests and then bishops often transferring those priests to new parishes.

Third; last weekend Archbishop Carlo Vigano, the former Vatican ambassador to the United States, released a letter alleging that Pope Benedict, Pope Francis, and other bishops knew that for several years McCarrick had sexually abused persons because he, Vigano, had told them.

Hearing all this may leave you with a mix of feelings – anger, disgust, sad, feeling betrayed. These are some of the feelings I am feeling now. This is a sad time in our church; a time of crisis. But a time of crisis is also a time which can bring us to God’s grace and call us to true holiness.

This is the story up to today BUT we as Catholics have the power to write the end of the story.

Today’s scripture passages are very appropriate. From the book of Deuteronomy, as the people are about to enter the promised land, Moses tells them –

“Now Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you and observe them carefully.” Sadly, some priests and bishops have not observed what they have taught to others.

In our gospel reading from Mark today, some Pharisees, Jewish religious leaders of the day, question Jesus. “Why do your disciples not ritually wash their hands before eating”?

In answering their questions Jesus says,

“Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written:

This people honors me with their lips,

But their hearts are far from me;

In vain do they worship me,

Teaching as doctrines human precepts.

You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.”

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

"From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

In light of what has been revealed recently in our church, every priest, including myself, and every bishop has to reflect upon Jesus' words.

From the letter of James today, James tells his listeners, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, or you are deluding yourselves". James goes on. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world".

Sadly, at times some Catholic priests and bishops have not been doers of the word which they have preached to others. Sunday after Sunday they have afflicted the sons and daughters of the church, the sons and daughters of God's family. You may have been asked this question by family members, neighbors, friends and coworkers – why are you staying a Catholic? You may have asked yourself a similar question. Am I going to stay in the Catholic Church?

We priests are asking ourselves a similar question. In his August 26, 2018 bulletin, Father Keith, the pastor of St. Katharine Drexel Parish wrote:

“I know that many current priests have asked themselves (at least once), “Should I remain as a priest in this church?” In answering that question, it has been helpful that we have been reading from the 6th chapter of John’s gospel at Mass for the last few weeks. Last weekend we heard Jesus say: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever.” That is the promise Jesus makes to us each time we receive the Eucharist...and that is one of the reasons I am grateful to be able to serve as your priest...so that promise of Jesus can be fulfilled. While the institution of the Church appears broken, and our spirit is heavy, the real presence of God is still in our midst each time the Eucharist is celebrated.”

Some observations and action items on where we go from here: In regards to the Grand Jury Report, I think there will be similar studies in the months and years to come from other states. The storm has not yet stopped but the truth will be spoken and revealed! In regards to Archbishop Vigano’s letter, there is going to have to be a full response from the Vatican and an investigation to ascertain the facts. Again, the truth will come out.

In regards to Archbishop McCarrick, there was a gross failure of episcopal leadership. Bishops have to be held accountable for what

happened and second, a mechanism has to be created to hold bishops accountable for their actions.

Archbishop Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Houston, who is the President of the United States Conference of Bishops, has stated three goals in his letter of August 16, 2018 to resolve what he calls a “MORAL CATASTROPHE”

- 1 An investigation into the questions surrounding former Archbishop McCarrick
- 2 The creation of new and confidential channels for reporting complaints against bishops
- 3 Advocacy for effective resolution of future complaints against bishops

Cardinal DiNardo goes on to write – “there has to be substantial involvement of lay people. Lay people bring expertise in areas of investigation, law enforcement, psychology and other relevant disciplines and their presence reinforces the criterion of independence”.

Bottom line – structural reforms have to be built and lay people, both men and women, have to be included, need to be empowered and have a place at the table.

The bishops of the United States will meet for their fall conference this November in Baltimore. The bishops always meet in Baltimore each fall because Baltimore is the first diocese in the United States. I

invite all to write letters to Cardinal DiNardo and Archbishop Lori, sharing with them your feelings and thoughts and the reforms you want the bishops to implement. Archbishop Lori, as host of the upcoming conference meeting in Baltimore, will have some influence on the agenda and subjects to be discussed.

Their addresses are on a flyer in the narthex.

Edmund Burke, the 18th century English statesman, spoke these words, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing”!

This is the time for good people to act. This is the time for good people to speak truth to power. This is not the first time in history that the Catholic Church has faced a crisis. The church of the 12th century suffered from corruption from within. In prayer, St. Francis of Assisi heard God saying to him: *Francis, is not my church in ruins? Go and restore it for me.* And that Francis did.

What God said to Francis of Assisi many centuries ago, God says to all of us again this day.