

21st Sunday OT – (Year B) – August 26, 2018

JOS 24:1-2A, 15-17, 18B; PS 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21; EPH 5:21-32; JN 6:60-69

Jesus is *not* one to mince words.

We see this clearly here in the **6th Chapter** of the **Gospel of John**. When a large group—perhaps the **majority** of his followers—realized that Jesus was **not** speaking **symbolically** when he called his **“flesh and blood”** (cf. Jn 6:54) **“true food and true drink”** (cf. Jn 6:55) which his followers must **“eat and drink in order to have eternal life”** (cf. Jn 6:53-54)—what did they do? The Gospel tells us:

As a result of this [teaching], many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. (Jn 6:66)

That was **John, Chapter 6, verse 66**. Did you catch that? **John 6...6...6!**

The number of **Satan**.

Satan the **dealer of *doubt***. Satan the **sower of *dissent***.

Satan successfully split the Church then—even as Jesus himself stood there and watched it **with his own human eyes**. The Devil achieved this feat by convincing a large portion of the flock to reject Jesus’ **“*hard saying*”** (cf. Jn 6:60). And the Enemy is working harder than ever **today** to split the Church ***again***...with the **unwitting** or, in some tragic cases, ***willing*** cooperation of **unscrupulous shepherds** and **depraved clergy**.

There is no shortage of opinions—**at *all* levels of the Church**—today about what led to the **abuse scandal** we’re ensnared in—***again***—as a Church.

Inside the Church, among the most common reasons given for the crisis are **homosexuality in the clergy** at one end of the spectrum—and **clericalism** at the other. The fact that these two causes are considered, for the most part, at **opposite ends of the spectrum** by a certain **influential faction** in the upper echelons of the Church is **precisely the problem**, as we will see with just a little critical thinking.

Naturally, we would expect the **secular world** to reject **any** suggestion that *homosexuality is a huge part of this evil infecting the Church*, despite the fact that the **2004 report** by a *secular* institution—the **John Jay College of Criminal Justice**—revealed that **81 % of clergy sex abuse victims were boys past the age of puberty**.

The secular world, which promotes **homosexuality** as a “**positive good**”, had no choice but to “**spin**” the sex abuse scandal as predominantly a problem of **pedophilia**—the abuse of **children**—to divert attention from the **truth staring them in the face**, so that their **homosexualist agenda** would not be undermined by *truth*. Lamentably, they successfully duped the vast majority of the population to call “**pedophilia**” what actually **was...and is...primarily a plague of homosexuality** in the Catholic clergy.

The secularists also convinced many *inside the Church* to bury their heads in the sand. As a result, there are still many—including some at the **highest levels of the Church hierarchy**—who still deny the facts staring *them* in the face—perhaps for fear of being labeled **homophobic** and losing their **influence, notoriety, popularity** or **power**; or perhaps because they themselves are either **supportive** of...or *part* of...the **homosexual subculture in the clergy** that is *undeniably* there.

Clericalism by itself, is an **utterly unconvincing** argument *to the extent that* those prominent cardinals, and those in their camp, who have most frequently cited **clericalism** as being the **principal** if not *sole* culprit in the scandal, deliberately and consistently omit any serious condemnation of **sexual immorality** from those same claims. They **look away** from the obvious...and they **look like fools** in the process.

It is precisely that kind of blatant *omission of the obvious*—that refusal to even **acknowledge** the facts in front of them—that destroys the credibility of certain **cardinals, archbishops** and **priests** *within* the Church...and which *undermines* **their**—and *our*—moral authority to evangelize *outside* the Church.

To blame clericalism *without acknowledging the gross violations of Catholic sexual morality* is precisely the kind of “**PR spin**” that faithful Catholics and non-Catholics alike are **sick to death** of hearing from the hierarchy. *It makes the Church look utterly un-serious about eradicating this evil from its midst.*

It's much more helpful to take the classically Catholic **“both/and”** approach. It's not **just** homosexuality — although it, **quite obviously**, *is* that...and **mostly** that. And it's not **just clericalism**. In fact—*properly defined*—clericalism may actually be closer to the **roots** of the problem than homosexuality.

Key words: *Properly...defined.*

If by **clericalism**, these cardinals mean the younger *generation* of priests—a group which includes me—who value a **genuine commitment to personal holiness, beautiful liturgy, frequent Confession** for *themselves* and their **flock**, faithful adherence to **all** the teachings of the Church—and most certainly the **“hard sayings”** of the moral law—then I borrow the words of **Jesus** to the **Sadducees**, and respectfully submit to their **eminences and excellencies**—*you are greatly misled* (cf. Mk 12:27).

But if, by clericalism, you mean those **cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests and deacons**, who **brazenly and deliberately sow seeds of dissent** and cause the faithful to **mistrust the teachings of their own Church**; or, who, if not perpetrating spiritual and sexual abuses **directly**, stand by timidly like **“men without chests”** and take **no action** when they witness this diabolical destruction...if **that** is what you mean, then I stand *with you*—**your eminences and excellencies**—in stating that **clericalism of that type** *is* actually much closer to the **core cause** of the scandal than even **sexual perversion**.

But we need to take it one step **further**. We must not stop at just **naming** the problem as **clericalism**. We must help the people of God see what **real clericalism** looks like in its **latent, not-yet-fully-developed form**, so they can **see** it, and **say something** about it, before it develops into the **spiritual tumor** that **consumes** the weakest, most innocent and most vulnerable **members of the Body of Christ**, as it did in the sex abuse scandal.

We must **cut out** this **cancer of dissent** at **Stage 1** when it's still **treatable**, rather than waiting for it to hit **Stage 4**—again—so we are forced to deal with **this same sick sex scandal**—again—sixteen years from **now!**

Before we consider what **real clericalism** looks like in its early stages, it's good to pause here and recall some **other** words that **Jesus** spoke in **John, Chapter 6**. Our

Gospel passage today ends at verse **69**. But here's what he said the final two verses of Chapter 6—verse **70** and **71**:

*“Did I not choose you twelve? Yet **is not one of you a devil?**” He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve. (Jn 6:70-71)*

I'm not a **scripture scholar** but I'm fairly certain that this exchange took place sometime in the **second year** of Jesus' **three-year public ministry**. That means that Judas was, by this time, pretty far along in the **sale of his soul to Satan**, despite having been with Jesus for at least a year. Jesus said here that one of the Apostles “**is**” a devil—not “**will be**” a devil. But some time would still pass before Judas **acted on** the evil that had taken root in his soul—before trading his **Savior** for a **sack of silver coins**.

It would be instructive to see those early interactions in Jesus' “**Apostolic strike force**”, because we might be able to **pinpoint** the *turning point* in Judas—where and when he began to betray Jesus in **small ways**. We know that he used to **steal money from the money bag** (cf. Jn 12:6). Maybe it started there—with **greed**. Maybe it started with casual conversations with his **political pals** who convinced him that Jesus was too “**spiritual**” and not “**activist**” enough. Wherever and however it started, *it was Judas' small, secret acts of dissent and disobedience that morphed into the most cruel and unjust betrayal in human history.*

The same holds true for the modern “**Judases**” in the **priesthood** and **episcopate** today—especially those who **abused** their flock and those who **enabled** the abusers to continue their **carnage** and then **covered their tracks** for them. One has to **hope** that, perhaps, these **depraved clergy** had at least followed Jesus in the beginning because they sensed a **vocation**—a **call**—to follow him. But somewhere along the way, they began instead to **heed the call of the Devil** and to give in, little by little—a **small betrayal** committed here...an **indecent liberty** taken there.

Perhaps it started with the **Mass**. Perhaps *Fr. Iscariot* believed he could make the Mass more **relevant** by toying with the words of the Mass...*just a bit*. Perhaps he might be more popular if he scrubbed the prayers of the **Mass** and words of the **Creed** of such **horribly oppressive**, “**patriarchal**” pronouns as “**Father**”...or “**Son**”. Perhaps by adding just one single letter—“**a**”—to the Creed, he could endear

himself to the women in the parish—appoint himself as their **champion**, their **advocate**—by saying that Jesus became “**a man**” instead of “**man**”.

Maybe it didn't stop with the **Mass**. Maybe the liberties taken by *Fr. Iscariot* at the **pulpit** and **altar** extended to the **counsel** he gave **married couples**. Maybe it was the married couple who had three or four very young children and who felt that another child **right now** might *break* them. Maybe it was *Fr. Iscariot's* “**pastoral**” advice to couples like them that:

“In your case (wink wink) it's ok to use *birth control* because the Church's archaic rules are overly burdensome and need to change anyway!”

Or maybe when *Fr. Iscariot* was doing marriage prep and encountered a young couple who was **living together before marriage** he told them, “**Well, that's the reality...as long as you love each other, it's ok.**”

If he was willing to **betray Jesus** in such small ways, can we really be surprised when *Fr. Iscariot* eventually ventured out sexually with a **boyfriend** or a **girlfriend**—or God forbid—a **boy** or **girl**?

Can we **not** see *now* why he didn't feel right holding his own parishioners to a **standard of holiness** that was—**well**—just too **hard** for *him*? And how could he be a Pharisee and tie up a heavy burden on his flock that he was unwilling to shoulder himself?

Here again, the **words of Jesus** cut right to the heart of the matter:

He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. (Lk 16:10)

It's doubtful that abusers and enablers **start out** from Day 1 as abusers and enablers. But they no doubt begin as **betrayers** early on. And the sooner we call them out on their **small disobediences**, the better chance we have of preventing a **later, inevitable holocaust of the innocent**. But if we support their **small infidelities** especially when they justify **our own** infidelities, and encourage them to continue, then **we share, to some degree, in the havoc they wreak** on innocent souls.

There's an old saying in the Catholic Church:

If the parish priest is a Saint, his people will be holy; if the priest is holy, but not yet a Saint, his people will be good; if he is good, his people will be lukewarm, and if he is lukewarm, his parishioners will be bad. And if the priest himself is bad, his people will go to Hell.

My brothers and sisters, there is a lot more at stake here than *where* your priest falls on the spectrum between **progressive** and **traditional**—between **liberal** and **conservative**.

A priest who loves you—a priest who is a true **father**—**wants** to lead you to *heaven*. And **good** priest is **not** going to tell you something that is **dangerous** for your **soul**.

A **morally bankrupt priest**, on the other hand, either because of his **narcissism**, or because of his personal **insecurities**, or worse, because he feels so **guilty about his own unfaithfulness**—his own *secret life*—his own **betrayal of Jesus behind closed doors**—that he just doesn't feel right challenging you to follow the same Jesus that *he* himself has **rejected** and **betrayed**...such a priest will have no problem sacrificing the **souls of his flock**, because he has no regard for **his own soul**. And he hands Satan a double victory!

The purest and most diabolical form of clericalism is deliberate disobedience to the promises a man made at his ordination to be **another Christ**—an *alter Christus*—**not an alternative to Christ**.

If your **priest**, or **bishop**, or **cardinal** is **saying** and **doing** such things, then he is putting *your* soul in danger, no matter how “**gentle**”, how “**welcoming**”, how “**pastoral**” he might **pretend** to be. Only a “**Judas Priest**” willingly walks the **path to Hell**, and wantonly takes other souls with him.

Nobody should be surprised, then, that these imposters are often the most **charismatic**, most **popular**, most “*affirming*” priests—whose **pews are full on weekends** and whose **parish purses are fat with cash**? I've lost count of how many **abuse victims** described their **devourers** as just this kind of charming “*guy*”.

What did **St. Paul** say about such betrayers?

...such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Cor 11:13-15)

If we **really** want to solve the problem of sexual abuse in the Church; if we **really** want to rid the Church of this **demonic plague**; if we are **really** serious about protecting the innocent and vulnerable from harm by *evil clergy*, **then we are going to have to rise above concerns about what names we might be called...and do the right thing**. We are going to have to demand that the unfaithful clergy stop all *spiritual* abuse of their flock, before it becomes **sexual** abuse. And if they won't stop, or **step down** voluntarily, then we must go to *whatever lengths that are within the realm of justice* to stop them.

To do the right thing, we must **name the problem** for what it *is*, and learn to recognize its emergence **before it can do the most serious damage**. It is far better to hear the **culture** call us "**homophobes**" than to hear *Jesus* say, "***I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers***" (cf. Mt 7:23) when we stand before him in Judgment. The **abusers** and their **enablers** clearly don't believe in **Jesus** or the **Judgment**. They are nothing but *atheists in priest's clothing*.

In today's **Gospel**, after being abandoned by many of his disciples:

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" (Jn 6:67)

It wasn't until this past week that I asked myself for the first time while meditating on this verse in **John, Chapter 6**:

What would have happened if Judas had either *confessed* to Jesus what he had become, and begged Jesus to save him; or *walked away* with the rest of the crowd who at least had the *integrity to behave in a way consistent with their unbelief*?

Closer to home: What would have happened if the **abusers** had done likewise?

The **worst**, most *diabolical*, most **evil** form of **clericalism** is a priest, bishop, archbishop or cardinal **staying in the Church and willfully abusing the authority given to him by Christ** when he *himself* doesn't even **believe** and **submit** to what the Church teaches. His own spirit of dissent is a **suicide pact with Satan** and a **death warrant** for the souls who follow in his *filthy* footsteps.

Such a monster may **say** he believes what the Church teaches. But *the people of God are not stupid!* If he **preaches dissent; peddles** his poison in **books or speeches**; goes to the “**peripheries**” *not* to bring back lost sheep, but to **affirm** them in their **sin**; or worse, lives a **secret, sordid sexual life** that flows from his **dissenting heart**, and wreaks havoc **not only** on innocent **bodies**, but also on innocent *souls*, then God help **his** soul when he passes from this life into the next.

Let us see it...and let us *say* it...clearly:

The root cause of the *clergy* sex abuse scandal is the *willful spirit of dissent* from the teachings of Christ, as safeguarded by his Church, and the *disobedience* that—left unchecked—*naturally* and *inevitably* flows from the dissent...to the great destruction of innocent bodies and souls.

Until we are willing to **call this cancer what it is**, and **accept the hard consequences of rooting it out**, it will only be a matter of time before it surfaces again.

The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (cf. Mt 16:18). Jesus promised as much. But **nowhere** did he promise that there *wouldn't* be great losses of souls in the crossfire. That's because **fidelity to Jesus**...is up to *each* person.

We do well to take very seriously the admonition of **Joshua** in today's **1st Reading**:

Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve him completely and sincerely. Cast out the gods your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is displeasing to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. (Jos 24:14-15)