

Mass for Healing

Our Blessed Lord is a tremendous Lord: generous, kind, knowing each of us intimately, calling us to follow him to be his precious and Holy people, His Kahal... How we have failed him... We have taken the light of the world – the charge to be his shining mission and light in the world and reduced it to a blight. The horrifying effects of the abuse of those vulnerable, whom we were called to protect above all else, will remain a deep and heavy scar on the Church for many years to come. I will offer no defense of these actions or of the policies that covered them up. They are indefensible.

But we remember who we are. We are first *His*. You've heard this often lately – stay focused on Him, on the Gospel – He will never leave us – even unto the end of the age. We have heard this, we have said it, we have preached it and we have been criticized for doing so. “It just isn't enough.” As wholeheartedly as I disagree, I understand why one might say this. This is so horrible.

Of one of the many objections to this--the one I heard just today--reflects a cultural impression of Christianity: “They just keep promising heaven - they promise heaven and future reward for being good today. What a fairy tale!” However a person may say this, it is not a fair or accurate depiction of what we believe nor does it speak to the reasons any of you might say this. But we remember that we believe that because of Jesus Christ, heaven is wedded to earth and that the beauty we see around us is sign of God's love and spurs us on for heaven in eternity. Earth is crammed full of heaven. I blame you not, however, if you cannot see this today in the world around us.

So today, as we pray for the Church, we hope that we can come to see the Church as the avenue to become related to God and not being an end in itself, is worth fighting for, is worth the work of our hands and the prayer from our spirit to make it again a shining path to holiness.

As we consider this reading from John's Gospel account we are given a sentence of Jesus' that starts his listeners in tremendous excitement no doubt: “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Yes... Yes... Finally – the victorious reign of our God has begun! Free us from oppression – destroy our enemies! And then he proceeds to confuse them deeply. “Amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” That God had to die is an unthinkable idea; He replaces the idea of victory with the shadow of the Cross. They did not understand this – not because they weren't listening, but because they refused to try. This mismatch was too great; the expectation would not be met. “I will believe in you Christ if you do for me what I wish you to do.” But for Christ, glorification is always a shadow of the Cross – and the Cross glorifies because the flipside of the coin of pain is love.

We don't refuse the Cross or put it down without refusing also to love. Who doesn't suffer terribly when their own child suffers? Who doesn't hurt for the neighbor whose husband or wife has just died? Who doesn't mourn the crimes that have sickened the world in the abuse of power that is evident in sexual harassment, assault, and abuse – even among all other forms of abuse -- who doesn't suffer because the world is full of this dark night of violence, violation and sin? We all suffer – not because we are punished, but because we love. We have a shining light within us that demands to be seen by others; therefore for those who know Christ, this horror is even more blisteringly painful because it demands so much love to endure, because the cross is so very heavy – because the bleeding is so deep and free. This pain, if felt in this

way, is a sign of intimacy with Our Blessed Lord who endured this all in the greatness of his love at Calvary.

As I was ordained priest, the joke was among friends and family that I'll have to put in a good word for them so that they can get into heaven. May those days pass away. The behavior of priest abusers and bishops covering up those abuses – though largely a generation ago – has shown us what our blessed Lord has already told us: that for the religious leaders to enter the Kingdom of Heaven it will be more difficult. His woes and criticisms of the scribes and Pharisees to be transparent and to be cleaning the inner and outer self at the same time is spot on and very importantly noted daily.

So perhaps I could propose a few other things to keep us on the path to not only recovery, but for the Church to flourish; for in spite of the terrible difficulty in which we live, the world is still starving for God.

- First, not excusing anything of the horrible crimes and sins that have been perpetrated within the Church, we understand that we join our prayer for victims of violence and abuse with those for *all* victims – we should not ever limit our prayer to only those abused within the Church – this abuse happened in the Church for various reasons: Chief among them is that it created a safe environment for predators in the past, rather than for the vulnerable as we do today. However, we know that horror exists in the world exists also in the Church. Our prayer is to successfully fight against abuse everywhere; we condemn sexual abuse, harassment, and assault wherever it happens.
- Second, the world has forgotten the beautiful. We are confronted with a world that looks at the people whom they encounter as objects to be used rather than subjects to be loved. Beauty is a reminder that God is responsible for our creation. Our first reading says something that we should say everyday: “God hates nothing that he has made – For what could have sprung forth from him that could be hated.” In all encounters, as wrong as a person might be, we do not judge, or condemn... We love. We love as Christ loved us: allowing himself to be nailed to a cross. Surround yourself with beautiful things; beauty is a reminder that God loves us. Stop and look at the sunset, enjoy a delicious food or wine, or whatever. Thank God for every beautiful thing that you experience or beautiful person that you know. Abuse and the problems of sexual harassment are signs that we do not believe in the soul -- ours or the victim's. Our age is an age of taking, using and the abuse of power.
- Third, human power corrupts; God's power perfects. God's power is called grace. It acts in us to make us perfect. Perfection is the goal of faith and grace; it's path is holiness and is found in his Church; the path leads us to Jesus Christ. We have far too easily mistaken an earthly or ideological good for a heavenly good. “Who should I vote for?” Has become a more frequent question than, “How can I know Christ better?” The greatest human good is still full of evil, but the least good from heaven contains no evil. Our trust is in heaven and the Earth knows no sorrow that heaven cannot heal. Always keep this in mind. The good I do is best when it is God's will working through me to feed the poor and lift up the lowly. This cannot be stressed too much.
- Finally, for now, we remember that left to our own weakness, we will respond as the apostles did at Gethsemane as Jesus prayed before Good Friday. Eight away from Our Blessed Lord, and three asleep right next to him. One betraying him. We remember also

that when Christ was crucified, they all ran away with one exception. We participate in this. Our friend's face, bloodied, is dark with our sin and abandonment. No one may claim innocence of the Cross, just as the Cross is horrifying and hard for us to consider. It is also our salvation. All of us with small and great sins alike, to be healed, must approach the Cross in all humility asking pardon for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

A dying man once said to me, "I just want Christ to recognize me as his friend." I've never heard anything more beautiful from anyone. May this be true of us all. The healing from these atrocities present in the world will not be easy, but it is possible – only by the Grace of God offered us in Jesus Christ. If this is still insufficient then I challenge you to beg to know him in prayer. Push me to become a better communicator and servant of Him. I will do whatever I can to assist you.

The purpose of the Church is to become related to God. In each passing day of our life together are we further along? Do we go around the year like a spinning top or descend more deeply into the mystery like a drill into a piece of wood? If our lives are rich then they are rich because we have inherited the great fortune that Christ offers. If this is so, then we must know him deeply. May it be true for us. Before anything else, do we open our eyes in the morning saying "Good morning, God" or do we say "Good, God! It's morning."? The truth is that as much as I called this Mass for Healing specifically in light of the terrible sins of abuse perpetrated in the Church, I want us all to heal, small and great sinners alike. I want us reconciled, I want us always one – never accusing another without a good hard look in the mirror at ourselves too. And forgiving with divine passion not earthly conditions.

We remember the Cross and that in earthly terms the Cross is a failure and a disaster. From that grain of wheat however sprung the divine life that we may share because Our Blessed Lord died. So today the Cross is a sign of victory. Reflect on it often and fully. Do not be afraid. Embrace the sadness to receive a part of His Glory.

If we can do this, then the light of Christ will illumine everyplace on this earth. Our light will be cured of the blemishes we carry and the Church and the bleeding wound of the culture will heal, Be brave, have hope. If you have Christ you lack nothing. Invoke his name and ask for his healing as often as you think of it. Pray for priests, Our Bishop and Our Pope – they certainly need it. May your prayers rise up to him and find your friend waiting to answer. I am yours and eternally grateful for your many kindnesses. Stay beautiful; you are the gift that God gives me with each day that I live among you. Thank you and may God heal us all. Amen.