

To Whom Shall We Go?

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jesus asks his 12 disciples, "*Do you also want to leave?*" Peter answers, "*..., 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: 67-69). At the same time Jesus' followers had a hard time accepting his saying, "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*" (John 6:51). How can Jesus give us his flesh to eat? (refer to John 6:52). As a result of this controversy over the Eucharist, many followers no longer accompanied Jesus. Jesus is still controversial today, and His Church, the Catholic (Universal) Church, which he built upon Peter, the Rock, continues to be under attack on several fronts.

Yes, the Devil continues to attack the Catholic Church. Our civil society is rejecting key teachings of the Catholic Church, including: sanctity of life (from the womb to the tomb: no to abortion, no to euthanasia), sanctity and indissolubility of marriage (no to divorce), sinfulness of any homosexual acts, opposition to same-sex marriage, openness to life in conjugal relationships (opposition to artificial methods of contraception, acceptance only of Natural Family Planning) and opposition to any form of death penalty.

At the same time, the Devil is acting within the Church itself. While we recognize that we are all sinners, the recent release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report has exposed the scandal of priests abusing children, and of bishops' attempts to cover-up. While most of the cases occurred 30 to 70 years ago, there have surfaced recent cases of abuse and cover-up. I have spoken about this scandal at the end of all Masses two weeks ago. Yes, like many of you, I am still in shock about these new reports on child abuse. I feel betrayed and angry. Every child is precious and needs to be protected. There is no excuse for any priest to harm any child. There is no excuse for any bishop to cover-up a single abuse. I was shocked in 2002 when the abuse scandal exploded in Boston. As a seminarian in Boston from 2005 to 2009, I met several people whose parishes had been affected by abusive priests being rotated from one parish to another (there was hope they had been "cured"). On the positive side, I can assure you that measures have been taken to enforce the agreed zero-tolerance policy in the United States since 2002, including screening of seminarians and removing priests from their parish positions as soon as a single allegation has been made. Anyone associated with activities involving children is required to undergo a background check and training (VIRTUS).

As your pastor, I will continue to protect all our children by implementing the above-mentioned zero-tolerance policy. I will continue to listen to your observations and recommendations. Please do not hesitate to contact me personally. I will make a point to meet you promptly. You can also write to me (letters or email pastor@olhoc.org). As your pastor, I will keep reminding you that **Jesus is the head of our church and nothing can prevail against it** (reference Matthew 16:16-18). For 2,000 years Jesus has led our Church in amazing ways. Despite attacks by civil society and despite internal scandals, the Catholic Faith is and will remain strong. Jesus had promised that when he ascended into Heaven, he will not leave us alone, he will send his **Holy Spirit**.

I encourage everyone in our parish to seek the **Holy Spirit** as guide and comforter in these challenging moments for our entire Church. In this **Year of the Holy Spirit**, I encourage everyone to come and participate in **The Gift: A Life in the Spirit** course during the six-week period before Advent (more to come on this). Choose to attend one session a week (Tuesday evening or Saturday morning).

Pope Francis has just written a **Letter to the People of God** (August 20) dealing with clergy sex abuse. He begins this letter addressed to all of us with words from St. Paul, "*If one member suffers, all suffer together with it,*" (1 Cor 12:26). The Pope continues, "These words forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons. Crimes that inflict deep wounds, pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also their

family members and in the larger community of believers and non-believers alike... The pain of these victims and their families is also our pain...Let us beg forgiveness for our sins and the sins of others...May **fasting and prayer** open our ears to the hushed pain felt by the children...By an attitude of **prayer and penance** ...we may grow in the gift of compassion, in justice, prevention and **reparation.**"

Let us respond individually and together to Pope Francis' call for prayer and penance! I suggest that everyone consider praying **one daily rosary for:**

1. the victims of sexual abuse,
2. their families,
3. the conversion of their abusers and reparation of their sins
4. for all current seminarians, priests and bishops to respond generously to the call to **holiness**, and
5. the Unity of the Church.

Consider praying these Five intentions; one for each Decade. We may also consider **fasting** one day a week, (e.g. skip lunch every Wednesday). And we may do all this for a total of 6 weeks or 40 DAYS! Additional suggestions are welcome!

To whom shall we go? May the **Holy Spirit** strengthen our belief in **Jesus**, and that with Peter we can say: **Jesus, you have the words of eternal life, we have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God! Come Holy Spirit, living in Mary**, strengthen my belief in the **Miracle of the Eucharist: Jesus is the Bread of Life**. Whoever **eats my flesh** will have **eternal life!**

One in Christ,
Fr. Alain