



*Special Note: Every homily evolves as it is delivered. This is the final version that was delivered at the 11:30 AM Mass. There were no changes except for small additions from the previous masses. Also, this has not been checked for any grammatical or formatting errors. Finally, this homily is my communication with the faithful of Saint Philip Parish. Any wider circulation is beyond my intent and should receive my permission before it is republished or distributed.*

**The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
August 18 and 19, 2018**

**Special Homily: Clergy Sexual Abuse of Minors**

Friday afternoon, Bishop Bradley sent a letter to the priests of the Diocese, saying that it is to be read after the prayer after communion today. The letter speaks about the recent news of more allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. Which I, of course, will read. But I had already prepared my thoughts to address the same thing, which as your pastor I have a serious responsibility to do.

His letter, as well as my words now, will be published as an insert in next week's bulletin. I know these thoughts will merely scratch the surface, but it's about the best I can do right now.

Let me share with you a story. In early 2002, I was a "transitional" deacon who was growing nearer to finishing my studies so that I would be ordained a priest of the Catholic Church on August 3, 2002.

Every day after our main meal of the day, the other transitional deacons and seminarians gathered in the TV lounge to watch the news. I remember it very clearly: we were watching the TODAY show and the headline came from Boston: a terrible cover-up by the Archdiocese of Boston and its leadership. A cover-up that began with the revelation of one priest, 86 victims, and \$30 million in settlements... all of which had been kept tightly secret.

And in the darkness of the TV room, one of my classmates, who was also to be ordained a priest a few months later yelled out, "Gee, thanks a lot. Great year to become a priest, huh?" I have to admit at that moment I was discouraged too.

From there, the national scandal began. By the end of Lent that same year, 55 priests in 17 dioceses were removed, suspended, put on leave, or forced to resign or retire because of their horrible actions towards children. Of course, I am referring to the revelation of sexual abuse of minors—at least in this country.

Now as an aside, we all know that "little pitchers have big ears." So, from here forward I will refer to this crisis as "indiscretions," which is a woefully inadequate word. But I leave it to you parents to choose the words and when and how this must be addressed with your children.

Since 2002, the crisis continued, although seemingly less so. Just when we thought things had settled down, this past week was every bit as bad as when the crisis started. As most of you know, a Pennsylvania Grand Jury released its findings that the indiscretions of 301 priests caused harm to over 1,000 minors.

**"COME & SEE"**  
-Jn 1:45-51

We have to remember that this is one state out of 50. In my opinion, the same process needs to happen in every state of the country, regardless of the pain, embarrassment, shame, and hurt this will cause the Church and all of us. As Saint Paul told the Ephesians, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them." (Eph. 5:11)

More importantly, though, it may be the beginning of a source of some healing for the people who have been victims of these horrible indiscretions. Only some can know the pain this has caused them. In my mind, it is unimaginable and unthinkable. With you, I am hurt, angry, sickened, and even somewhat lost.

With you, I have heard and read the reactions of so many leaders in the Church. With you, I hope for more than words, but actions and change that may bring some comfort to the survivors of this moral and criminal evil that has plagued the Church. I do believe that there are some survivors who wish to find positive ways of driving change. I thank and respect those who want to be part of the solution and not pour salt into incredibly deep wounds that exist.

All this being said, I want to offer these further thoughts in which I hope will begin to bring change to any doubtful thoughts we might have about our Catholic Church which Christ Himself founded.

First, we must be careful from falling into the trap of the Evil One. He will try to implant within us an attitude towards the Church and her priests that could cause us to denounce all priests... to make us think that the unacceptable indiscretions of some priests must mean all priests must be in the same category.

Yes, all priests... and all of us... are sinners. But there are many good and holy priests who strive each day to honorably serve their people--- young and old. While the statistics we are hearing about those priests who are guilty of these indiscretions are staggering, we cannot allow ourselves to take a broad brush and paint every priest as being evil. But it is true that separating the wheat from the chaff can be hard to do. As an analogy, I think of what police officers have gone through during these last years. The mistakes of some have caused many to accuse all officers of similar attitudes or actions. I know first-hand, as the department's chaplain, how this causes tremendous pain to the good and faithful officers who are there for us every day. They, too, are deeply pained by mistakes made by their brothers in blue. As a priest, I am deeply pained by mistakes made by my brothers in black.

Additionally, we should be careful of allowing the devil to influence us in making judgement on those who are accused, but the accusation may be unsubstantiated or even erroneous. That too, has happened, and when we fall into that trap we are allowing the devil to dance.

There is evil in the world, and the Evil One wants these indiscretions to cripple the Church. The Church is greater than that, and Satan will not prevail; "...the gates of hell shall not prevail against (her)." (cf. Mt 16:18) Second, we should be careful not to blur the lines between these indiscretions and other mistakes- even serious ones- that clergy sometime make. No man is perfect, and no priest is perfect. We are all sinful, and I put myself near the top of the list.

I'm sure this has caused every priest to examine his own life and try to renew himself towards rooting out any and all evil and sin from his life—yet knowing it is impossible to do so completely. However, we hear Jesus tell us, "Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (cf. Mt 5:48) I think it is fair to say that, in our human weakness, nobody can expect perfection, but all of us should strive towards it as Jesus commands. And when we fail, we seek God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

There are some who are hungry to put all sins in the same category. The crisis we now face is about the indiscretion of some priests which were committed against minors, which is both morally and criminally wrong, as well as those who kept such indiscretions secret. Let's keep laser-focused on that right now.

We should also be careful on who we listen to when it comes to conjectures about why this has happened. Some automatically blame clerical celibacy, some try to attach it to orientation, some use this as a call for women priests and more. Let's be clear, **those are important but, in my opinion, separate** issues to explore. It is not fair to instantly try and use these as "reasons" --as some do -- that we face this crisis. As the book of Proverbs said in the first reading today, we should "advance in the way of understanding." (cf. Prov. 9:6) Perhaps that understanding will lead to specific, fundamental problems. But we should be sure that we do not use these indiscretions to drive our own or somebody else's agenda.

Third, I truly believe that seminary formation has changed over the last few decades. Clearly, that has made a difference. Many of the men guilty of such indiscretions were ordained priests years—even decades ago. It is very **un**common to hear of such indiscretions committed today. To be sure, even one indiscretion is too much. But I think we should know that formation of seminarians has changed for the better.

Fourth, there are some who will say that this problem is not just within the Catholic Church. While I respect that fact, it is not a good argument and, in my opinion, should not be used. People should be able to expect more from priests. Relating that to other statistics in society are not compatible.

And once again I turn to the victims-and hopefully survivors- of these horrible indiscretions. I hope you will come forth and share with me if any clergy connected with this parish – past or present – are guilty of the indiscretions of which I speak.

I apologize to the survivors. But I also apologize to all of you. In a way, you are victims, too. You should not have to go through this nightmare again. You deserve better, and you should expect more. There are many more points to be made. The Church has some explaining to do, and must regain the trust of the people. I believe that will happen. I believe that the Eucharist... the Bread of Life... will help renew us. The Eucharist, the "source and summit" of our faith, does not depend on the worthiness of the priest. The Eucharist will bestow grace on us so that we can see through the darkness of this time and bring us into the light of life.

May God grant forgiveness, mercy, healing, and peace. Praised be Jesus Christ!