

*“Will you also leave?”*

5:00p, 8:30a St. Colman Church

I wanted to preach on something different this week as I know Fr. Thomas did a great job last week talking about the present scandal /– I was able to listen to it on the web. Which by the way if you didn’t know – the homilies can now be accessed through the St. Colman Website – under the Liturgy/Sacraments heading.

I also wrote about the scandal in a long pastor’s column this week in all of the consortium bulletins.

I wanted to return to something more uplifting – something more just focused on the Word of God for the weekend. I’ve grown tired of hearing people in news forums and such ask Catholics this week – “So – are you finally going to leave the Church now?”

So I turn to the readings for refuge – and I hear the Lord asking the same darn question – when all these people are leaving Him and the Company of the Twelve –he turns to the Twelve and asks, **“Do you also want to leave?”** - Let me ask you that – and answer honestly to yourself – this week has your answer been

different, or less sure than in the past: “Do you also want to leave?” Because that is what the Lord is asking us today in the Scriptures.

Some will try an evasion tactic and say “I feel like leaving the Church but not Christ” but the Lord closes that door for us with the second reading today. St. Paul at the end of that reading says that “Christ and the Church” are in an *indissoluble* union. He quotes Genesis – about a man leaving his home and becoming One Flesh with his wife – but then concludes, **“This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and His Church.”** So while we might not want the Church – just Christ – it’s apparently a package deal. You want Christ, you get His Church as well. He’s become one flesh with her. But would he have, had he known how horrible some of his leaders would be – how hypocritical, how cruel and callous? Would he still have loved her? But then the Lord shuts the door on this tactic, when we read in the Gospel today: **“Jesus knew *from the beginning* the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him.”** It’s the mystery of God and human freedom. He knew Judas would betray him and yet still called him to be an Apostle. Judas’ own decisions in freedom had to play out. God does not destroy human freedom because that would destroy the possibility of love at all. And so we see human freedom play out in the Church and in society.

But there's also another very important reason on why we should remain with the Church. It is part of love to try to love the things that the beloved loves. So for example: you watch a young man in love start to learn all about girls softball not because he likes it, but because the girl he is in love with does. He wants to share this with her. Today St. Paul reveals to us that Christ is intensely in love with this Church. He goes into great detail about the loving devotion of Christ to His Church and even lifts this devotion up for you married couples as the model for your own marriages. If He loves the Church that He founded *this* much – then if we love Him we should try to love her the same too.

We think we feel scandalized, hurt, embarrassed – what must Christ feel? We are told today the Lord came to **“cleanse her by the bath of water and the Word that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”**.

Imagine how disappointed a husband would be if on his wedding day, just as his bride came walking down the aisle - he realized that her bridal dress was covered in filth and stains, that her hair wasn't made up, that she hadn't done anything to get ready for this day – whereas he had spent weeks and months preparing himself? - The disappointment – the realization that maybe she doesn't love him *nearly* as much as he loves her. What of our Lord? At what cost did he get ready

and do what must be done to get his bride ready – **“Christ handed himself over for her”** those words “handed over” can also be translated “betrayed” – Christ betrayed himself for her. He betrayed himself to the Cross. Christ is passionately in love with His Church. And the Church is not just the bishops and priests, not even just the good bishops and priests which are the overwhelming majority, the Church is you and you and you. It’s in your power and my power to help cleanse Christ’s bride - to work towards making her holy and without blemish. To allow the water and the Word of His to wash us.

Which finally brings us to the first reading and the last part of this homily. Joshua, in this reading is at the end of his long life, he is about to die – he is concerned that the people make a choice. He doesn’t want to die knowing that the people are “kind of – for the Lord but kind of not” – He wants them to make a choice. When? *This Day*- and again I hear the Lord speaking to us today – through His Word, **“decide TODAY whom you will serve...[and then Joshua encourages us] as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

The Lord doesn’t want us reticent when someone asks – how can you remain Catholic – how can you accept this stuff? - “well I kind of think I should stay but kind of not” – No, He would love to hear us speak His word today – echoing Peter – we turn to him and say **“Lord, to whom else shall we go – You**

**have the Words of Eternal Life”** and to the people who ask us this question to hear us simply echo Joshua –**“As for me and my house we will serve the Lord”** – and what does it look like to serve the Lord at this time in history – it is to work hard for the cleansing of his bride – to assist him in his desire to make his bride holy, and without blemish.

I conclude with three suggestions towards this, reiterating some of what Fr. Thomas spoke last week and the Pope wrote this week:

- 1) Prayer – make the Lord a promise – that you will spend more time in Prayer for the Church than you do in discussing and debating about it. The remedy for this spiritual sickness can only come from the Lord. There are going to have to be changes made by the leaders but it’s going to take wisdom and courage – and those two needed gifts can only come through God’s intervention.
- 2) Fasting – Reparation – these little sufferings united to Christ’s suffering, to his “handing himself over,” can bring great graces to the Church. It can also strengthen our will power to resist sin in our own lives – if we are used to denying ourselves little comforts we are more capable of denying ourselves when temptation comes. Reclaim Friday as a true day of penance – fast or abstain from meat or in some other way live Friday and even Wednesdays

as days of reparation. Also see my column for information about more structured and comprehensive ways like through Exodus 90

- 3) Write a letter. Let your leaders know you demand reform. Key pieces of reform include establishing safe channels to bring complaints about bishop's misconduct to the attention of those who can do something about it and also no longer tolerating repeated violations against celibacy whether those encounters were illegal or not. You can write our Bishop, or Cardinal DiNardo the head of the US Bishops, or the Vatican's nuncio in Washington DC – the key is to give enough support to the reforming bishops that they will have the clear support of the people when they convene.

And finally we do these things not out of bitterness but out of love for the Church, especially out of love for the Lord who according to the Letter to the Ephesians today, wants nothing more badly than that his bride, the Church, **be holy and without blemish.**