

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time/Mass of Reparation and Healing

October 13, 2018 6:00 p.m. St. Joseph Parish, St. Joseph

I can honestly say that over these many years that I have been your Bishop, I have always looked forward to the various occasions that have brought us together around the Table of the Lord, here in this historic and beautiful Church in gorgeous St. Joseph, Michigan.

Whether it's been for happy and joyful occasions such as Confirmations or Graduations, or for sad and reflective occasions, such as funerals, or just for normal and ordinary occasions, such as a regular Sunday Mass or for a special weekday event, such as the Walk for Catholic Education Mass for which I'll be with you here again on Monday, I always look forward to being with you. Today's gathering is much more challenging.

As we do every time we gather for any and every occasion, we do so as People of Faith. But today, at this Mass which focuses on the sins and failures of some priests and bishops, we gather as people whose faith has been shaken, whose confidence in the Church and her leaders has been damaged or even temporarily lost, and whose hearts and souls, normally filled with trust, instead are filled with confusion, disappointment, disillusionment, anger and distrust.

As your Bishop, I stand before you embarrassed because of what a number of my brother Bishops have been accused of doing, which includes, in some cases, mismanagement of serious issues; in other cases, possible intentional cover-ups that may have kept predator priests in ministry and interfered with just and compassionate treatment of victims; and in a few cases, and clearly the worst example of all failures, some few, who themselves committed heinous crimes of sexual abuse against innocent and trusting children and/or vulnerable adults. I hope you know that it breaks my heart to say that out loud in this holy place.

In the name of the Church, I apologize from the depths of my soul to all of you, and to all the Faithful who have a right to expect so much more, and who, because of the actions of some, have all been hurt, shocked, and, yes, scandalized.

The summer months of June and July were sullied by the shocking reports of a Cardinal of the Church who admitted to taking advantage of seminarians and young priests, and worst of all, as it turns out, was also guilty of many crimes of child sexual abuse. Not only were we shocked by the details, but then we learned over the ensuing weeks, from the Archbishop Vignano Letter and many other sources, that it seems clear that there were those in positions of authority and influence---members of the hierarchy--- who may well have known of these crimes and terrible sins at the time they were taking place, but turned a blind eye.

While the search for the truth in all these allegations is still taking place, and in fact are still unfolding as we saw with Thursday's announcement that Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Wuerl as Archbishop of Washington, D.C., what is already very clear is that there is something terribly wrong and sinful at the highest levels of our beloved Church. In that regard, I also deeply apologize to all of you for the failure of those bishops who did not stand up for what was right, and who failed in their responsibility to be good and faithful Shepherds of the Flock of Christ.

And following upon the heels of that awful story about former Cardinal McCarrick, came the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report in the middle of August, which recounted in pornographic detail what more than 300 priests in 6 dioceses in Pennsylvania did to 1,000 children over a

period of 70 years. And at that point, shock and anger turned to rage. As one who grew up, and spent the vast majority of my life as a priest in Pittsburgh, one of those Pennsylvania dioceses, I was particularly troubled by the gravity and enormity of that report, and was personally pained as many of those situations involved priests and people I know.

While I am very sorry for all of you, and all the Faithful of our Diocese, who have been so deeply shaken by all of this, I need to express my deepest apologies particularly to the Victims. To any, and all, victims especially of clergy sexual abuse, but victims of any kind of sexual abuse by anyone associated with the Church, I beg your forgiveness on behalf of the Church. And I take this occasion to publicly urge any one who, as a child, was a victim of clergy sexual abuse; if you haven't done so already, please report it by contacting the "Hot Line" available on our diocesan website, and I assure you, we will follow up immediately. There really aren't any words that can express the depths of regret for the pain, suffering, and trauma any Victim of Clergy sexual abuse has endured. I want all Victims to know that the Church stands with you, and we remain committed to do all that we can to support you in any way possible.

While we may not have the words to express our outrage, over the last couple weeks, we heard Jesus speak out very strongly, and even angrily, when He expressed His concerns about how "the children", or as He also referred to them as "the little ones" were treated. Two weeks ago, we heard Jesus say that anyone who hurts a "little one" and leads him/her astray, "*it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea*". And in last Sunday's Gospel, St. Mark told us that "*Jesus became indignant (when He saw the disciples trying to keep the children from coming to Him), and He reprimanded them by saying, 'Let the children come to Me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'*" I think we get a very clear sense of where Jesus Himself stands on the evils of clergy sexual abuse.

In this Sunday's Gospel passage, which we've just listened to, we see a calmer Jesus, engaged in a conversation with "the rich Young man", who came to ask Jesus the same question that each of us must ask and find the answer to for ourselves: "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus answers his question with a very basic response: Be sure to follow the commandments. But when the young man proudly responded that he was regularly faithful to those commandments, Jesus was able to show him where he was lacking---that if he really wanted to pursue the path to Heaven he needed to put everything else aside, including his many possessions, and focus not just on avoiding sin, but on living a holy and virtuous life. Unfortunately the young man wasn't quite ready to "hear" that, and, as St. Mark tells us, "*he went away sad.*"

Could that be at the root of these serious problems that all of us have become painfully aware of in the Church? At least the young man in today's Gospel was asking the right questions. Could it be that those priests and bishops who have committed these seriously sinful and criminal acts against innocent children have stopped asking that most basic question of how to live a holy and virtuous life?

Jesus has the correct plan of action for when someone leads a "little one astray" when, in using strong hyperbole, talked about cutting off one's hand, or foot, or plucking out one's eye if it's the occasion of sin. Similarly, this scourge in the Church must be "rooted out", the evil must be "cut off", and anyone not willing to do whatever it takes to protect the little ones should be "plucked out" and replaced by those who are.

The summer months of June, July and August were filled with Scandals. As people with wounded faith, I hope that we can pray for a Fall-time of Forgiveness. Even if we're angry about

what is taking place within our Church, and even if we are wounded in our Faith, we still remain God's holy People---People of Faith.

During this Mass, I hope we will all pray for Reparation---to somehow find the ways to "repair" what is broken in the Church; to pray for an openness to be healed. That's not an easy thing for any of us to do. As we heard Jesus tell us in today's Gospel, sometimes we find that our human limitations make certain things "impossible". But as He told His Apostles, and as He wants to remind all of us: "*For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.*" And I have no doubt that God wants to heal his Church, and He wants us to be healed as well.

And so, how does all of that address this awful situation with which we are faced in these days of the Church's scandals? Jesus has not abandoned His Church. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church, even in these dark days. He is leading us through these awful revelations about the sinful practices of some Shepherds into a time of purification for the entire Flock. And let us not lose sight of the fact that through our Baptism into Christ, and our Confirmation in the Lord, we are people filled with that same Holy Spirit, for the purpose of being Jesus' witnesses in the world. And so all of us must also do our part.

Even though we may be wounded and shaken in our Faith, we are still God's holy People. And we are people who are prompted by the Holy Spirit to speak out on behalf of the "little ones", those mistreated, oppressed, scandalized or abused; and to speak against the evils that we find in the world, and yes, in the Church. The Holy Spirit works to root out Evil, **but** the Holy Spirit also works to repair what is broken, to heal what is wounded, and to unite what is divided. The Holy Spirit will always work thru all of us as members of the Body of Christ to accomplish and to further the mission of the Church. And as members of the Body of Christ, when we see one member or part of the Body doing what is wrong, or hurting the rest of the Body by his/her sins, then the rest of the Body must call him/them to greater accountability, whether those members are priests, bishops, cardinals or any other position in the Body.

I also take this occasion today to apologize to you on my own behalf as your Bishop if there has been any way that I have not served you well, or shepherded our Diocesan Family of Faith in the proper ways. And I take this occasion today to assure you of my absolute commitment to continue to work to restore trust here in our Diocese, and to continue doing whatever we can to make sure that our children are safe and those who are vulnerable are protected.

I also want you to know that I have confidence that the Bishops' Conference will investigate completely all these public scandalous incidents so that we can come to an understanding of how the awful revelations that came to light this summer could have happened, and to take whatever steps are called for to make sure that nothing like this ever happens again.

We pray today for Reparation----to repair what has been broken. We also pray today for Healing----at least to begin the process of healing, to make efforts to restore trust, to heal the wounds in the Body, and to allow the Spirit of God, Who lives within each of us, to guide us to work for transparency in the Church, accountability for Bishops, and a spirit of openness and greater communication among us all.

And most of all, let us pray that the **Summer of Scandals** will never, ever take place again, and that this **Fall time of Forgiveness**, will lead us into a new **Springtime of Hope**, because---we are a People of Faith. And our Faith is rooted in the unwavering Hope in our God Who loves us and sent His Son to save us, and by doing so, has conquered for all time, the power of Sin and Death thru Jesus' Death and Resurrection.

It is true that for us human beings, on our own, none of this may be possible. But not for God. Jesus promises us that all things are possible for God---including repairing and purifying His Church! May that be our comfort and consolation.

May God bless us all, now and always!