

Holy Thursday – Mass of the Lord’s Supper – April 18, 2019 – Reflection

“Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, ‘the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”

So spoke Abraham Lincoln near the end of his Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865. The “scourge of war” the President spoke of was, of course, the Civil War, a war between brothers that sundered the country; a war fought over the “peculiar institution” of slavery, a stain and a sin on the national soul which Lincoln believed had to be righted before ever there would be peace and union.

The other day, as millions all over the world watched the pictures of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris in flames, many many reacted with deep sadness at the near loss of such a long-lived symbol of the beauty and greatness of Christianity and of a people’s devotion to our Blessed Mother.

After a while though, my sadness began to give way to another deeper and darker feeling. I looked at the fire as a kind of parable like the ones Jesus used to tell. Always, but most especially on this night of the Lord’s Last Supper, the Church is the Body of Christ. For years and

years, the Body of Christ has been under attack: millions of her youngest members have been denied their right to live before their eyes ever open to see the light of day; families, who are the domestic Church, have been fractured and destroyed all too often, all too easily by selfishness and the callous disregard for the sacredness of a vow; the beauty of the body has been muddied and cheapened by egos run amok and the celebration of a freedom of behavior that allows anything and demands almost nothing; the poor members of the body are seen as a drain, a scourge, an invasion by the comfortable rich Lazaruses of the world; the elder members of the body, the sick members of the body are thought to have nothing to contribute, are thought to be owed nothing and so, are mercifully pushed out of the way; even the trusted Fathers of the Body of Christ have, all too often used the vulnerable young to satisfy their lusts while destroying those lives of faith; and, the Body has been deserted by so many members who have never come to know Jesus, never felt the warm love in the community, never been formed by parents and their parents in the marvelous ways of faith, never thought they needed a God or anything but themselves.

It is not a far leap to look at the Church, the Body of Christ, smoldering under the fire of so many attacks.

The other day in Paris, as groups of ordinary people watched the Cathedral afire, first responders put their own lives on the line to save the church. A priest chaplain rushed into the inferno to save the Blessed Sacrament, the Body of Christ. Groups of onlookers, strangers united, prayed together, sang together: "Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria!"

"You are Peter, and upon this rock I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Hell has unleashed its fury. The Body is wounded, the structure burning. But the faith and hope and love of ordinary members will survive the purge, repair the damage, turn again to Christ and His Blessed Mother, and the Body shall rise from the ashes and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.