

This has been a week of great anger and pain for all who love Christ and His Church - and not just this week, all this summer, really. Two months ago our parish and our archdiocese were confronted with the news that a former deacon, a man who had served in this very church, was accused of committing unspeakable crimes against the most vulnerable among us - against children. I truly felt it was a blessing that I was able to be home, to pray with you on that first weekend of such horrible news. At the same time, news was breaking nationally about a former cardinal, a prince of the Church, a man who had voted in the election of Pope Benedict XVI, that he had, for decades, been engaged in the same grotesque behavior. And now, this week, a grand jury report was released that detailed the horrifying abuse of children by clergy in Pennsylvania over the span of 70 years. And it highlighted the cover up by bishops and diocesan leaders who moved the priests around, allowing these horrific crimes to continue. And this report covered only 6 of the nearly 200 dioceses in our country. More stories like these are sure to be told in the coming months and years.

For all of us who love the Church, there is pain and mistrust and furious anger. And well there should be. We should be hurt. We should be angry. We should be calling for resignations and punishments and jail time. This abuse that has happened for decades is evil. The cover-up is evil. And if we aren't angry at such heinous abuse, such corrupt negligence, then something is wrong with us.

If, somehow, you have been unaware or have been avoiding this recent news, I beg you, please inform yourself, at least on a basic level. We must not pretend that evil does not exist. We must not allow ourselves to be in the dark about such terrible crimes. Because if we do not pay attention, if we pretend that evil does not exist, then we risk falling into the same trap of brushing aside, of covering up, of allowing evil to continue. That path has been tried; and we see clearly now where it leads - to depravity, to scandal, to hell.

Instead we must pray and work for the healing of the victims of these horrible crimes. Countless men and women have had their lives destroyed, their faith destroyed by this abuse. We must love them. We must pray and fast and sacrifice and work for their healing. And, as Christians, we must pray for the grace to forgive. This is what sets us apart from everyone else - the command to forgive. We must pray for the salvation even of the abusers, we must pray for the salvation even of those who covered up their crimes. This is what it means truly to forgive.

As we confront this evil, as we work as a Church to root this out, there is one temptation that we must avoid at all cost: despair. The temptation to despair would lead us to lose all hope. The temptation to despair would have us believe that all is lost. The temptation to despair would make us reject the Church or reject God. But this will not bring us healing or comfort or relief. Instead, we must pray for hope. Hope allows us to trust that evil will never overcome. Hope shows us that darkness cannot overcome the Light. Hope assures us that God is faithful and that He is near to us, especially in the most difficult days.

And this hope is not superstition or wishful thinking; we have sure reason for this hope. The Church has faced great evils in the past; and in every case - in every case - God has been faithful. In the darkest days of the Church's history, the Lord has raised up from among her members the greatest saints. When the Church has been most corrupted and most in darkness, the Lord has given us reformers who could re-ignite the flame of faith.

In the third and fourth centuries, the early Church was nearly engulfed by the heresy of Arianism, but the Lord raised up great saints like St. Athanasius and St. Nicholas of Myra to bring light to the darkness. In the 11th century, in the midst of corruption in the clergy very similar to our own day, the Lord raised up St. Peter Damian to condemn evil and preach the truth. In the 12th century, when many in the Church had become obsessed with wealth and power, the Lord raised up the great mendicants, St. Dominic and St. Francis and St. Clare, beggars who reformed the Church through powerful preaching and lives of intense poverty.

In the 14th century, when the pope himself had abandoned the Vatican for Avignon, France, the Lord used St. Catherine of Siena to call him back to Rome. In the 15th century, when the Church was being torn in two by the Protestant Revolt, the Lord raised up St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits to bring the truth of the Gospel. In more recent times, great saints like St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross gave their lives as a testament to the light in a world darkened by Naziism; and Pope St. John Paul II stood up as a prophet against the forces of Communism.

Knowing all of this and trusting that God is faithful, I have found myself asking God in prayer, Where are the great saints? When will you raise them up for us today, Lord? But the Lord has shown me that I have been asking the wrong question. We can't look around for someone else to be the great saints of today. We can't look around for other Catholics to lead the reform so desperately needed in the Church. God is calling us - me and you. The Lord has been showing me what should have been obvious - we must be the great saints of our day.

This is what St. Paul was saying to the Ephesians in the second reading: "Brothers and sisters: watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil." We must make the most of our opportunity for holiness. No longer can we afford to live lives as mediocre Christians. Great saints are not mediocre. (And I ask you to remind me of my own words when I start to slip into mediocrity.) Great saints are on fire with a passion for the Lord. Their love for God is visible to those who meet them.

And where does this love come from? Where does this fire come from? There's three big places:

First, prayer. If we wish to be great saints, prayer must be a part of our lives daily. Prayer individually; if you're married, prayer as a couple; prayer as a family - daily. Pick up the Bible and use it to pray. Allow God to speak to you through His Holy Word. It is living and effective! Pray the rosary and try to pray it everyday. Mary always leads us closer to Jesus, and she will help to light in us the flame of faith.

This week we will begin reciting the rosary publicly everyday in Church before daily Masses and before the 4pm and the 6pm Masses on the weekends. Join us for this, if you can.

Second, confession. One of the most important things for us if we wish to become saints is to encounter the mercy of God. The Lord Jesus poured out mercy and forgiveness for us on the Cross. In confession we have direct access to that mercy and forgiveness. The more we recognize our own sinfulness and our need for a Savior, the more we will desire to follow Him in every moment and every decision of our lives.

Third, the Eucharist. These evil crimes in the Church will surely cause many to consider abandoning the Church. And if nothing else, there is one reason to stay: Jesus is present in the Eucharist. Jesus said in the Gospel today: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” The Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ. It is our connection to Jesus. Here He comes to us, He shares Himself with us. He is the food of the saints. If we wish to be great saints, we need Him. Come to the altar as often as you can. Come daily if you can. Allow Jesus to strengthen you. Allow Jesus in the Eucharist to be the light burning inside of you, because Jesus living in us is the light that will overcome the darkness.