

*(I seldom write out transcripts of homilies and almost never make them available beyond my archives, however, the homily from last Sunday is one that is deeply personal as well as topical for the questions that we sometimes receive from others. The constant call for evangelization must always include the difficult aspects of life in the Church as well as the joyful).*

*In a departure from the norm*, this week's homily is in many ways different from most others in the sense that it is more loosely based on the Scriptures for this weekend, and is more deeply based on my responses to the revelations of the scandalous reports from Pennsylvania and the conduct of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. I, like many of you, was disgusted when the details of those reports first came to light, and I have had a difficult time trying to make sense out of things. Last week, a few people asked why I chosen not to preach about the topic. While we included an intercession in our prayers of the faithful, I have to say I was just too angry and I had not been able to sort things out in my mind or heart. I usually plan on getting some kind of rationale in my mind and try to figure out how to feel about it afterwards, but this is so deeply personal that it just hasn't been possible--so you will have a homily that is preached more from the heart than from my head.

The first response that I heard from the Church following the reports was from a bishop in the Midwest who stated that "The Church had failed..." That response produced a very strong reaction in me--I wasn't sure what was wrong with it, but viscerally something did not sit right. I thought about it quite a bit, and determined that "NO! the Church did not fail--for WE are the Church--the Body of Christ in the world--the people of God who gather together again and again to celebrate the Word made Flesh that dwelt among us and who offers Himself again and again for the sake of our salvation." Those who have perpetrated the abuse and those who have covered up for those abuses have failed. The moment that they committed themselves to those acts or were conscious of those who were guilty separated themselves from the Church, from the loving presence of Christ who promised to be with us until the end of the age. In those moments, they ceased to be the Church. I DO believe that the Church is a place of mercy and reconciliation, but there must be contrition for that forgiveness in order to receive that mercy that God so freely gives. The Church has not failed, but those who are institutional leaders, who continued to present themselves as leaders within the Church when conscious of the evil they had done, or knew had been done by others, failed.

While we may justifiably recognize our anger as appropriate, the struggle still remains for us that is present to us in the gospel. Jesus asks his disciples "Do you also want to leave?" That is a reasonable question--but ultimately in the end, the only answer I can offer is Peter's: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

I am privileged to have the confidence of several other priests in my life, and one of my closest friends told me shortly after the revelations became public, "I'm just done. I don't think I can do this anymore--I'm just done. I don't think I can go through this one more time with my people." He has been ordained nearly as long as I have, and I treasure his friendship and his leadership and his wisdom. I told him that no matter where he goes, he will still take with him all of the

struggles and the pain that these revelations have caused. We might have the opportunity to go somewhere else and do something else out of the public eye, but he is still "one of the good ones," there is no way to just leave it behind. He has constantly been a good pastor to his people, they have confided in him and have shared their burdens with him--he IS a priest and a pastor to his people. For men such as he, there is no real escape for he will take that pain with him.

The same might be said for all of us, for the whole Church. We take the pain of these days and we recognize it as the suffering of Christ in the world. Those who have been abused have suffered the death of Christ in excruciating ways, and we who are caught up in it are caught up in the sufferings of Christ in countless different ways. Yet, we are the Body of Christ and the fulness of the Paschal Mystery: the life, death and resurrection of the Lord are ours. We cannot deny who we are. "Master, to whom shall we go?" We must return again and again to the mystery that is ours to share, the Eucharist. In the breaking of the body and the outpouring of the blood of Christ, we are united in the fulness of that mystery. What takes place here, among us gathered together is nothing less than the promise of resurrection from death--in our gathering together, in our prayer for one another, in the sharing of the sacrifice of Christ we are healed and made whole. There is no other way and no other place to be at home.

I have jokingly referred to the fact that before I entered seminary, I dated my way through the Protestant Reformation--dating members of other church communities--Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Seventh Day Adventists and even a Mormon--but there was no home for me there--it was only in returning to the Church that I found the only answer to the hunger within me--in the presence of Christ, in Eucharist. I do ask myself the question, "why do I stay?" It is a passing fantasy every once in a while--I imagine that I am still employable somewhere in the world--I think I could learn to make a good frappuccino or pull some great espresso shots, but again, the answer is the same: "Master, to whom shall we go?"

I also have the privilege of offering counsel to several other priests in ministry--one priest in particular from another diocese and I have been in conversations for about 18 months. He and I regularly speak by telephone or occasionally in person about every 6 weeks. Following this portion of the scandal, he telephoned in crisis telling me he was "done. Pennsylvania was the last straw, he was finished with ministry, ready to leave." I listened until he was finished and reminded him that 6 weeks before the news report, he had told me the same thing, and 6 weeks before that, and so on and so forth. I told him that whatever it is that he decides, he needs to take responsibility for it himself--he cannot use these revelations as a rationale for why he leaves. He must do as Joshua does in that first reading today, he must choose. So must we all. As for me and my house, we will choose the Lord.

I would like to say that this is the last horrendous and shocking kind of revelation we will ever have, but I cannot. The Church has been rocked with scandal since the very beginning. We have 2,000 years of betrayals and scandals, of horrific leaders guilty of terrible things; but we also know that Jesus continues to abide with us, who journeys with us, who feeds us again and again so that we may have strength for the journey. So why in the world am I preaching this homily? Every single one of us at some time or another asks the same question, "why do we

stay?" We are constantly reminded about the "new evangelization," and the importance of telling people about the beauty of the Church and spreading the Good News. But we are Catholic and the whole of the Paschal Mystery must necessarily be proclaimed: the life, the suffering and death and the resurrection of the Lord. You have already made decisions to be here for today--you have made that choice, but you are undoubtedly being challenged by Christians of other denominations, family members or friends, co-workers or neighbors, former Catholics or "recovering Catholics" (whatever that means), who ask you the question why you stay. This homily is not about telling you why YOU must stay, I'm telling you why I stay. I do not stay because there is no other choice, but because we ARE the Body of Christ and the fulness of the Paschal Mystery is ours--the Eucharist IS our identity as well as our calling, our hope and the promise of everlasting life. Our answer is always be the same as Peter's.