

September 9, 2018 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

SEPTEMBER 5, 2018 BY ST. CECILIA CHURCH

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ...

Jesus taught us in last week's gospel: *"Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile. 'From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.'"* It is true to a person and it is true to the Church. Satan knows better that he can't destroy the church from the outside but from within he can. That is what we have been hearing for several weeks now on the media. People with all this filthiness inside end up inside the church. They started defiling our holy church. People have been asking me to speak up about it. But I have nothing to say. I am heart broken. We here in the USA we are in a safe zone. We have never been persecuted for our faith. I believe this is our persecution. Last Friday evening I was running and praying my rosary. At the same time meditating on what to say. This psalm came to my mind. "I sought the LORD, and he answered me. When the poor one called out, the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him". I believe this is a time of distress. This is a time of darkness. This is a time to call out to God for mercy and strength.

As many of you know, over the past weeks, there has been a lot of news about sexual abuse in our Catholic Church: horrible, monstrous, demonic abuse perpetrated by, and covered up by, clergy, priests and bishops and cardinals. For all people of faith, for us Catholics, this has stirred up many reactions: rage and frustration that this was allowed to happen, horror at the type of crime, deep, deep sorrow for the victims, most of whom were young and vulnerable. What do I feel? I feel a sense of unspeakable brutal betrayal, a violation of trust.

As a priest, I share all of that. But, I also accept some share in the guilt: I am a priest, I took the same vows as those men, we are bonded by Holy Orders, and so I am implicated in their crimes. My heart breaks: I know the trust that people, especially children put in their priests, and to see it violated, so horribly and for so long and for so many, I can't even begin to express my sorrow for what my brothers have done.

But, I am sorry, and know that I, and all priests, beg your mercy. We are all, at least in this Diocese, called by our Bishop to penance, for the sins of our fallen brothers. We have to pay that price.

I assume as a Catholic a lot of thoughts go through your mind at this time. Maybe you are angry. You may say, "If this is how the Church acts, then I want no part of it." I don't blame anyone for that reaction. But, today, in these days of distress, I want to offer a spiritual reflection. As I think over the darkness of these days, my heart is brought back to the darkest of all the days: Good Friday. On that day, the world fell apart. The Savior of the World, God, hung beaten on a cross, dying naked like a common criminal.

His followers, the Twelve, who had been given special authority, had enjoyed the limelight of being with Christ in his popularity, each of whom had been entrusted much, had vowed they would stay faithful to the end. But where were they? Eleven of the twelve walked away: broke their vow, literally turned their back on God. They walked away. Today, in this time, we are right there on Calvary. Betrayed, angry, afraid this is the end, ashamed of the Church as we watch our Apostles betray everything, as it seems Christ fades into the darkness because the sins of His followers.

Are you tempted to walk away, too? But, while we stand here on Calvary, before you turn and go, Christ Crucified calls you to remember something amazing. The night before He died, the night He was betrayed by these Apostles, He sat down and with them and He celebrated the first Mass. Knowing that these men, 11 of his 12 closest friends would leave Him, betray Him, He offered them, not just bread and wine, a passing meal: He offered them Himself, everything, His Body broken and His Blood poured out, He offered the price He paid. And, it wasn't because Jesus was a fool that he didn't know what was coming. He was God: He knew what lay ahead on Good Friday, in all of its horror. And, He knew that in the centuries to come, the horror of Good Friday would be repeated over and over again: Apostles would sin, violate their vows, Crucify Him, and lead countless people to flee from His Church because of their evil decisions. He knew, on that Holy Thursday.

Jesus would say to all of us: My church is not a fortress of saints; it is a field hospital for sinful humanity. I shed every drop of My Blood for every sinner, no matter how horrible. And, in times of darkness, caused by the sin of my followers as Good Friday was, just remember Holy Thursday: how I gave myself in the Eucharist. The Bread of Life is my pledge that sin never wins, evil never conquers. I gave myself in the Eucharist to remind you that while the Gates of Hell, which may loom large, will never prevail. I remain with you in the Eucharist to remind you that this is MY Church: it is not the Church of any individual bishop or priest, no matter how good or bad. I remain with you in the Eucharist that you will have the strength, not to walk away, but to stand close to the Cross, to know that this time of trial is the price that we pay to save the world, that to leave it is to leave behind all hope.

I remain with you in the Eucharist so that you may know that, the darkness and pain and sorrow of today will give way to a new Easter, a new Pentecost. I gave you the Eucharist so that you could see clearly, in times of great sin, sin in the world, and sin in the Church, that this is why I came: to save all sinners.

I know these words don't solve anything. But, I hope they offer some spiritual perspective. I don't feel worthy to make this plea, but I will: don't turn away because some of the Apostles are unfaithful. Rather, by the power of Jesus in the Eucharist, stay near the Cross: be protected by Him. Use this time to renew your faith: you follow Christ, not any one bishop. Pray for the victims, and the perpetrators. Demand accountability from the church. But, more, demand holiness from us, your clergy: demand that we live like Christ, that we keep our vows of prayer and celibacy, pray for us and help us. Demand Holiness from you and bring holiness in to your family. May Jesus in the Eucharist be for us what it was for the faithful ones on Good Friday: our strength to remain through the darkness. Today, may we taste and see that the Lord is good, and may He have Mercy on his Hurting Church.

God Bless You, Fr. Thomas

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