

✠ A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR ✠

Dear Friends,

This week, as we continue to forge ahead amidst these heavy days for all of us as Catholics, I'd like to share with you here some of the points I raised in the homily I gave at last weekend's Masses:

During a time of crisis – and certainly we are in a crisis – we tend to focus only on the bad, because it is so explosive right now, while all the good that's still out there can get left in the shadows. On the one hand, we know, and I can tell you, that in our Diocese and in our parish we for many years have had the highest possible standards of safety for all of our children, young people, and vulnerable adults. At the same time, we know that the abuse that has horrified us happened long ago and the safeguards put in place throughout the Church are by all accounts working well. But still, all of us are left asking the question:

How could this have happened?

The answer, in a nutshell, is sin: evil, wickedness, and dishonesty, inside a culture where those with significant authority have all too often thought and acted as bureaucrats, rather than as fathers.

In these days, I have been tempted, however fleetingly, to lose a sense of hope. Maybe some of you have too. You may be so angry or demoralized that you are thinking of walking away from the Church, as many already have. I hope you believe me when I tell you that I understand that. *But I also know that the voice which suggests that we should leave Jesus because of Judas – and all the modern-day Judases – is the voice of the Father of Lies.* Some have even said that God has forsaken the Church. But that's not true. Some people in the Church – even some in high leadership – have forsaken Jesus and the Gospel.

During these days I have been thinking a lot, as I'm sure you have, about the good priests out there, especially all the good young priests, and those who are in priestly formation, or those who are discerning a priestly vocation. *What a triumph it would be for the Evil One if these good, strong, faithful young men who are an integral part of the*

solution Our Lord is raising up for his Church were turned away from this mission because of the treachery and betrayals of some of those who have gone before them.

In this regard, I want to share with you one sign of hope that I happened upon this week, which was a ray of bright light during an otherwise heavy time. I saw a "tweet" that was sent out by a seminarian from Nebraska who is studying at a seminary in Pennsylvania, which ironically is the epicenter of the crisis which is now erupting before us. This is what he wrote. He said:

A real light of hope for me amidst the dark weeks we've had in the Church: I've had more conversations than I can count with young priests and seminarians about how all of this scandal / betrayal / heartbreak has awakened in us a true desire to be radically holy and virtuous. I've heard so many young men say: "All of this has cemented in my heart that I'm not called to be a priest for me, or for bishops, or for any worldly reason ... I'm called to lay down my life for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." Time to live it. Pray for us."

That sentiment, my friends, is out there more than we might think if we were to judge just by what we read in the paper or see on TV.

Even though this crisis is global and complex, it is up to all of us – right here, and no one is exempt – to be part of the renewal of the Church. *To put it simply, the time for a mediocre witness to Christ is over.* If this is not a clarion call from Heaven to a personal conversion for every single one of us, I don't know what is.

What does that conversion look like? It means a new and personal resolve, for each of us, aided by God's grace, to be the kind of disciples who bring relief, and not pain, to the Heart of Jesus. It means a determined effort, with God's help, to *really* turn away from sin and to be faithful to the Gospel. To that end, allowing our souls to be cleansed and healed from sin in and through a good confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is absolutely essential. Anyone who claims otherwise is simply deceiving themselves.

AND, this is a reminder to all of us that

we can never allow the Church's ministers, no matter how important they may be, to come before our faith in Christ. This is *not* the same thing as saying "we don't need the Church" because that's not Catholic, and that's not what Jesus intended. It's just that we can never let our faith stand or fall on any priest, or bishop, or pope. That would be folly, and anyone who does that sets themselves up for disappointment. It is Jesus Christ alone who is the way, the truth, and the life, and who gives Himself to us through His Church, as flawed as her members and leaders may sometimes be.

In the coming weeks, I will be consulting with members of the Parish Staff and lay leaders to determine how we as a parish can best offer reparation to Jesus for these sins around the world which we know have wounded and grieved His Heart so painfully. At the same time we affirm and renew our bedrock commitment to ensuring, on every level, a truly safe environment for every person.

My friends, this time of purification will be painful, and it may not end anytime soon. That we don't know. But what we *do* know is that Jesus Christ will never abandon us, nor will His Mother, Mary.

So, as your brother and Father, I respectfully and humbly invite you, notwithstanding everything that has been revealed and anything to come, to continue to stand with Jesus Christ, whose Body, the Church, has been wounded and disfigured by sin, but who is ultimately and definitively victorious over sin and death.

In order to do that, let's ask our Blessed Mother, Mary, *to help us walk away* – not from her Son or his Church, but to walk away from any sin, to walk away from every compromise with evil, to walk away from lukewarmness and indifference and anything half-hearted in our discipleship, so that *we can be free to walk with confidence* toward Jesus Christ, who alone is the hope of every person, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

God bless you!

Father Marcello