

Welcome everyone, and thank you all for being here as we gather to worship.

Sometimes, the link between the Word of God we hear in the liturgy and our contemporary lives seems like a bit of a stretch, requiring us to think in symbolic or abstract terms. At other times, the application is pretty straightforward, like today. Joshua and the Israelites have to choose which gods they will serve – and the choice affects not only their own generation, but opens the way for their descendants to know God’s mercy. Peter and the other apostles have to choose if they will continue to follow Jesus, and be a part of spreading the good news after the resurrection. We all face moments of decision with our faith, choices that will have a lasting impact on ourselves and those we care about. These choices most often come when we face events that challenge our faith, as we do today.

We have heard a lot of disturbing news about the Church in America and throughout the world these past couple weeks, especially. A number of you have reached out to me individually to share your thoughts and forward articles to me about the subject, and I’m grateful for that. Please know I am always willing to speak with you as your pastor and spiritual father as we digest this latest scandal. Most especially, please know that, if you have suffered personally from clergy sexual abuse, how sorry I am for that betrayal of trust, and for the lack of love and support you may have received from us. The pain that we feel over these revelations is nothing compared to the pain that you have felt and with which you

continue to live. There is no excuse; to the extent that we were part of the problem, I and your fellow Catholics can only ask for your forgiveness.

The news out of Pennsylvania is, unfortunately, all too familiar. For many decades, priests used their position of authority to abuse minors, and the efforts of their bishops went to protecting the reputation of the priests and the church, rather than to protecting their flock from these predators. Pleading ignorance of the gravity of such abuse is not convincing. They would not have left these priests alone with their nephews and nieces, so they should not have left them alone in the homes of the faithful. This happened in Pennsylvania, it happened here, and most likely happened in virtually every diocese. We should prepare ourselves for the sobering reality that such revelations are not over, and the Church will continue to be in the news, perhaps for years to come.

The news about Cardinal McCarrick is new. He himself has been credibly accused of abusing minors, as well as using his position to engage in such activity with seminarians preparing for the priesthood. If true, this is yet another facet to the scandal, that someone who was charged with rooting this type of evil out of the presbyterate, who appeared on the news shows to speak about the Church's efforts and assure us that lessons had been learned, was himself a perpetrator. We can only pray that cases like his are not widespread, though we might fear they are.

God has been grieved long enough. He has heard the cries of His innocent children, and I believe His hand is at work in this present purification. It will be painful to hear as these reports keep coming, but we must not shy away from them. Let everything that happened in the darkness come to light so that the victims can find healing, the perpetrators mercifully find justice, and the Church begin to work to restoring the trust of the People of God.

What steps need to be taken to root out this evil from the Church is beyond me. I'm glad I'm not in charge of getting us from here to there, and I pray for the Holy Father and those who advise him. But let me speak how we, as individuals, incorporate this present reality into our life of faith.

We belong to a Church that is filled with sinners and led by sinners. I don't offer that observation in any way to excuse or diminish the gravity of the sin we're talking about. This isn't some ordinary sin. Nevertheless, if we haven't truly grappled with the fact that we are a Church of sinners, then we have to now. Christ founded his Church on one who would betray him, and continues to raise up from this group of sinners those who are charged with shepherding his flock. It is a structure that leaves the door open for situations like we find ourselves in today. And yet at the same time, he promised us, and it is our faith, that the gates of hell would not prevail against his Church.

And they haven't. Century after century, attacks from without and from within, and the Church is still here to proclaim the good news of Christ's victory over sin and death, and it will continue to be here until the day he returns and conquers them once and for all. As ashamed and shocked as we are, the Church will survive this scandal, it will survive the next, and the one after that, just as Christ promised.

Of course, it is still right for us to be angry when we hear of the particular sins of the priests and bishops. Righteous anger is the proper reaction to news of child abuse and coverups. These sins should never have happened, and faithful Catholics should not feel as though their anger towards their clergy and these sins are somehow a step away from the Catholic Church. It's not. We can have complete faith in Christ's Church and utter disgust over the sins of her leaders. In fact, we should.

What we must not do is truly step away from Christ's Church and therefore cut ourselves off from the grace of the sacraments. As Peter said in today's gospel, "To whom should we go?" What other Church has Jesus founded? What other Church did He promise to protect? What other Church feeds us with His body and blood, or offers us certainty of our forgiveness through confession? The enemy would like nothing more than for us to fall away and try to follow Christ without His Church and the sacraments, because he knows that that makes us easy targets. That is not God's will for us.

What is His will is that we cooperate with His purification of the Church, and that includes us. If we want the Church to be holier, then we must become holier. God raises up great saints when they are most needed, and they have never been more needed than today. If the world is going to believe in the saving message that Christ has entrusted to us, it is going to believe it because of the witness that we give.

Let us pray for the purification of the Church. Let us pray for healing for the victims of her leaders. And let us pray that we will play our part in making the Church what she was founded to be: the messenger of the good news of God's love for His children.