

MASS FOR THE BROKENHEARTED – HOMILY 9-24-18

As we come here tonight, our hearts are broken. They have been broken by what we have heard and what we have experienced. Some of you may have come because you have suffered a deep wound to your innocence. You are the victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests. You have experienced a deep hurt from those whom you thought you could trust and whom you should have been able to trust. You have gone through the pain of fear that your story would not be believed. You so needed to hear those important words, “It was not your fault.” Yet, all too often what you needed to say was ignored or even silenced by the Church leaders who covered it up when they should have been the first to come to your aid and uphold your cause. A further inexcusable wound has been dealt you by Bishops in the Church who failed in their promise to protect. Your presence here is itself a great act of courage. Thank you for that gift. We are here for you, and we pray that tonight you may experience a measure of the healing you need and for which you so yearn.

Some of you may have come because you have experienced other sources of hurt from the representatives of the Church. You may be family members of those abused. There may have been no one to listen to you when you turned to the Church in your need. You may have experienced harsh words or broken promises. It may be that a sacrament was denied you or denied to someone you love. In one way or another, you may have felt that you were misunderstood, ignored or treated with disrespect. We also are here for you.

Some of you are here because you have been faithful Catholics for many years, and you need something from the Church that has been part of your life for so long.

(Pause) Shock, betrayal, hurt, confusion, anger are all words that I have heard you voice as you respond to the news that has been anything but the Good News of Jesus Christ. This has happened because of the failures of those who should have proclaimed it not only through their words but also through their deeds.

Some of you have come to pray for those who have been hurt. Your hearts are broken for them. May God bless you for your goodness, and may your prayers be a powerful source of consolation for those for whom you pray.

As sad and tragic as this occasion is, we are still people of faith. We believe that healing is possible. We believe it because Jesus said it was. He invited people to receive it from him when he said, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.”

There is a pathway to that healing. Jesus is the only one who can give it, and he will give it according to his promise, but the pathway cannot be short-circuited. The first step along that path is to call the evil of sexual abuse of minors and other vulnerable persons by name. It is an unspeakable crime. It is a grievous wound inflicted on the body, mind, heart and soul of the innocent. It is a mortal sin. It is a cancer inflicted on the people of God.

The second step is to bring the truth to light, no matter what that truth will reveal, no matter how many times we need to hear it. Jesus himself said, “There is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light.” The days of cover-up should never have taken place. They must at last be over and be over forever.

The next step is the confession of sins committed. Those sins are many. They are the sins of abuse themselves and the sins of cover-up—the attempt to circumvent the will of Jesus, expressed in his words which I have just quoted. They are sins of inexcusable, unconscionable poor decisions, which allowed the abuse to continue and to be inflicted on new victims. They are the sins of the injury caused to those who have suffered so much and continue to suffer too long.

I know that for you who have experienced any kind of hurt from the Church what I represent as a priest is itself a source of that pain. With that knowledge, I humbly confess the sins that have been committed and ask for your forgiveness for what you have suffered. This is in keeping with the Old Testament tradition of the scapegoat. The people of Israel placed the sins committed by individuals in the community on the animal who would carry them off into the desert. I cannot take away the effects of the sins committed in the Church so easily, but I receive them in the name of Jesus, who said, “My yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

The fourth step is the action that must be taken to correct the situation in which we now find ourselves. Fine words, including the words I speak tonight, are not enough. They never were. From the Bishops and the Holy Father, we expect action that will lead to change. We need to voice that expectation, and we need to hold them accountable for fulfilling it.

It is a sobering task, to be sure, but one that must be undertaken if the healing for which we pray is to take place. In our faith, we look to Jesus. In the proclamation of his public ministry, he said that his purpose as God’s anointed was to heal the brokenhearted. We take him at his word. Therefore, we believe that, through the

power and mercy of our God, healing is possible, for indeed nothing is impossible with God.

The road may be long and hard, but we have his promise and we are here because we are counting on that promise. What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution? We are the ones who dare to believe that neither death, nor life, nor past things, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers or those who wield them, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Let’s face it. There have been some incredibly strong forces of pain, disillusionment, betrayal, confusion, doubt, fear and much more that we have already seen, and somehow we are still here. On a number of occasions now, we have been encouraged to place our faith and trust not in weak, fallible human beings, whether they be bishops, priests or anyone else, but rather on Jesus Christ who was faithful to his promises to the very end, when no one else was. If God is for us, who can be against us? He reassured his apostles, and reassures us once again, “Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.” “Master, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Fr. Larry Seidl