

Today's scripture opens with a beautiful image – Wisdom has built her house. It is a beautiful house with seven columns. Within is a mother who prepares an amazing feast. She calls out to the children in the city – come and eat. It reminds me of my own mother when she called out to us kids playing outside to come in. Supper is ready. Time to eat. It is a beautiful memory of childhood. A memory of safety and fun and love.

The house is also an image we use for the church. The household of faith. It is a beautiful image for who we are in Christ. When we reflect on the 2000 year history of the church, we can remember some amazing accomplishments of the church as a household of faith and as a mother calling to her children to come and be nourished.

A few years ago I read a book entitled “How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization” by Thomas E. Woods. Dr. Woods, who earned his Ph.D. in History from Columbia University, makes the case that the Catholic Church has accomplished foundational work in building western civilization through the development of the University, hospitals, the progress of science, the rule of law, the free market economy, and the sacredness of all human life. All of this as an expression of the gospel of Jesus.

In our own Archdiocese we can look back to what our forebears built from the early days of Kentucky's history. We think of the foundational work of Fr. Charles Nerinx in central Kentucky, Bishop Flaget shepherding a vast territory as our founding bishop, Mother Catherine Spalding and the amazing work that she and the women religious did. The sisters of Loretto. The Ursuline sisters. The Dominican sisters. The incredible faith and hard work of the clergy, religious, and laity down through the years. There are so many amazing stories. They built an incredible household of faith consisting of parishes, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and charitable institutions. Wisdom has built her house. Many people were nourished when she called them. It is a beautiful image of the household of faith.

But the house is on fire. And it is a fire that is burning worldwide now. Last spring we heard the news of the crisis in the church in Chile. With increasing vigor the survivors of abuse told their stories. It led to the entire conference of bishops in Chile going to Rome to meet with Pope Francis and tendering their resignations. This summer we heard of allegations against the former cardinal McCarrick, and his resignation and restriction from ministry. Just this week we read the devastating report from the Pennsylvania grand jury with stories going back 80 years. Stories of unspeakable crimes committed against children and young people. Our beautiful house is on fire.

I've been struggling with what to say to you today. I feel gut-punched by this. I've lost appetite. I feel shamed, dismayed, and on the edge of tears. It feels like 2002 all over again. We heard the stories of some of our own household who suffered abuse as children or

young people. We pondered the failures of leadership in church and society to adequately address these crimes against children.

I imagine you feel much the same way. We are struggling with this together. And if we are all feeling pain over this once again, please be mindful of those who suffered abuse. For them, this pain and suffering was and is enormous. We must stand with them first and foremost. Theirs is a voice that must be listened to.

In the 2nd reading St. Paul exhorted us with these words. *“Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil.”* After 2002 we dedicated ourselves to providing a safe environment for children and young people. In partnership with the Center for Women and Children we offer safe environment training relentlessly in our church. Before beginning the school year all of our Pre-K and Kindergarten parents attended a workshop held here at Holy Trinity. We establish good boundaries for the safety of our children and our adults. We have all learned in safe environment training of the current statistics - that one out of every four girls and one out of every seven boys have been a victim of some sort of sexual abuse by the time they reach the age of 18. As catastrophic as abuse seems in the church, when we consider these statistics in the larger society, the problem of this evil is enormous. And it is but one of the evils of our age that we face. All of this is so overwhelming and disheartening.

Listen to the next words from St. Paul. *“Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.”* This, brothers and sisters, is our first task. I don't have the wisdom to know answers to these things. But in prayer and reflection this week I feel called to begin some kind of spiritual reparation. In my prayer-book and by my nightstand, in addition to my written priesthood promises, I have made a personal commitment to reparation that includes prayer, fasting and penance. This is my own one next right step in response. Remember, the first words of Jesus in the gospel were *“repent and believe, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”* It's a fundamental first step.

Listen next to what the Spirit says to the church today through the words of St. Paul. *“Do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”* I invite you, dear people, through your prayers and sacrifices, to ask God to send the cleansing fire of His Holy Spirit into the church. Please encourage one another in all of this. I think that the next task lies with the entire church. This is the hour of the lay faithful. The bishops and the clergy cannot fix themselves by themselves. For that matter, modern society has become rotten with corruption on so many levels. It will take the leaven of a holy and purified church to bring true renewal and healing to our broken world. You are called, dear ones, to this hour, and this task.

Therefore, with ever-greater intensity let us cry out – *“Come Holy Spirit. Renew the face of the earth.”* As we cry out, we gather around our Eucharistic Lord. Jesus himself is the reason we are here. He is the living bread that comes down to heaven. He is our wisdom. He is our house. He is our meal. He is our hope. He is our savior. Let us come to him once again as his own household of faith.