



Homily

September 16, 2018 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Deacon Robert Long

In today's gospel, Jesus asks his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" Peter quickly answered him saying, "You are the Christ," meaning that he recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah. When Jesus began to teach them what God's plan for salvation was; that he would suffer greatly, be rejected and killed and then rise after three days, Peter pulled him aside and essentially said to him, "Wait a minute! You can't let this happen. You are the Messiah and the Messiah is supposed to be a great King in the line of David who will come and free us from the oppression of the Romans!

Jesus immediately rebuked him and in front of all the disciples said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." You see, Peter wanted things to be as he wanted, not as God wanted. He was acting like Satan in preferring the worldly to the divine.

When I read these words I immediately thought to myself, "How many times do we still do this today?" How often today do we see society touting the worldly instead of the divine way of thinking? In other words, how many times is our immediate reaction to a situation one that causes us to think like human beings do instead of how God does? And the real question is, do we even recognize what we are doing?

For the last several weeks our Pastor has addressed the latest information surrounding the abuse of children by clergy in the Catholic Church. On September 2, he had a letter written by Bishop Baker addressing this issue printed in our weekly bulletin. This letter was edited to fit into a one page space while retaining the true nature of the communication. This week, you can read the letter in its entirety as Msgr. instructed that all two and one-half pages be printed.

Several Face-book postings have been passed around which used harsh and accusatory language against our pastor. There were some in our parish and in the catholic community at large that felt like it was a cover-up or a deliberate concealing of the Bishop's message by not printing the entire two and one half pages initially. To that, I answer, "Baloney". The full text of the Bishop's letter was, and has been, readily available through multiple electronic sources for several weeks, including the diocesan web-site. There was no attempt at a cover-up or deception or an attempt to keep anyone from reading the entire text.

The sad thing is that the authors of these Face book postings made no attempt whatsoever to qualify or justify their harsh statements by simply contacting the parish or our pastor directly and asking if in fact these allegations were true. Had they done so, they would have readily discovered that they were not. Instead, they choose to spread false statements. This my brothers and sisters is a form of Scandal. Many of these social medial posts were spread by others, thinking them to be the truth. And that was wrong. The only mistake here was the unintentional omission of a message indicating the text was edited and directing the reader to a site where the full text could be found.

This over-the-top reaction is a perfect example of what Christ said to Peter, "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." The immediate response – the human response – was to think the worst of someone before seeking out the truth. And that is wrong.

Having said this, I will say that I understand why this type of immediate reaction to an assumed wrong-doing occurs. I get it. This clergy child abuse issue is an emotionally charged subject that is sometimes hard to speak to. But today, I am going to be very straightforward with you about it.

As Bishop Baker said, what has taken place in our Church by some in the ordained ministry; deacons, priests, bishops and even cardinals, is “evil, horrific, excruciating and absolutely intolerable.” He also calls it out for what it is – predominately, but not exclusively, homosexual behavior and abuse – and this needs to be addressed immediately and profoundly wherever it is identified.

In fact, we are living in times that the prophet Isaiah described in Isaiah 5:20. We are living in times where evil is called good and good is called evil. Society is trying to force down our throats the idea that homosexual lifestyles are good and they are doing this in the name of fairness. And many of our politicians are going along with it. While at the same time the efforts of good people to stop this is called evil. We are being told we are denying people their equal rights. These good people are being vilified in the popular social media sites and by the mainstream media news outlets for thinking as God does, not as human beings do; for preferring the divine instead of the worldly way of life. Our morality, our goodness and yes, even our Church is under attack by this scourge both from within as well as without.

But let’s also make sure we understand where the Church stands on homosexuality. I would like to share the following with you from a homily given recently by Father Robert Altier of Crystal Minnesota.

He said, “...We need to make an important distinction. There are some very, very good people who struggle with a homosexual orientation. All of us struggle with different things. That doesn’t mean that we are a bad person just because we have certain weaknesses. And the Church recognizes that [homosexual] orientation is not evil; it is the activity which is evil. And so, for these men [and women]

who want to live a good life and who are trying to fight against those temptations and the struggles, this is a cross they bear. And it is a huge cross that they have to carry. In fact, you can think how much God loves these people if he allows them to carry a cross that is that big. It is huge.”

“[To look at it another way], there are some for instance who struggle with drugs or people who struggle with pornography. If they are [truly] trying to fight against those temptations then these are good people with a weakness. That’s different for instance from the drug dealer, or from the guy who is making pornography; those people are pigs – [pure evil]. The guy who is struggling and trying to live a good life, [a chaste life], is a good person with a weakness, and that is the distinction that we need to keep in mind.”

The Catechism of the church is very clear about this. It says that persons with Homosexual inclinations must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. And, it says they are called to chastity. This is where many who carry this cross are failing. This virtue is being ignored and sadly, even within the ranks of ordained ministry.

Fr. Altier continues (in paraphrase), “Just so we are clear you should know that the Church is very adamant that men with a deep-seated homosexual tendency are not to be admitted to the seminary. That’s not because the Church is being discriminatory or hates these people. It is the same principle if you look at it and say, “Would you take somebody who is struggling with an alcohol addiction to a bar?” It is a point of temptation and that is what the Church is looking at to say this is not good.” The Church will not lead someone into temptation.

Bishop Baker is making every possible effort to ensure that our diocese is not tainted by this evil of homosexual abuse. As he said in his letter, through our Youth Protection Program, background check and lay-member Diocesan review Board, we have been vigilant in our efforts to protect our children. And through the efforts of Msgr. Rohling and Father Liju as well as all of the deacons , the same

amount of effort is being made right here at OLV church and school.

Unfortunately, we have probably not heard the end of this issue in the nation-wide news. And make no mistake about it, it is not isolated to the Catholic Church. It occurs just as frequently in the Protestant denominations as well as in schools despite the fact that popular media seem to focus mostly on the Catholic Church.

But I also tell you my brothers and sisters that we are not to despair. This is not something that we are to run away from. To do so would be to commit spiritual suicide. As Bishop Baker said, we cannot allow these scandals to destroy our faith. We need to continue to pray and we need to fast because our Lord told us that with this kind of demon only prayer and fasting is going to be able to get rid of it.

And yes, your voices should be heard. But they can only be heard if you continue to be in the church. Change from within cannot occur if you are outside the church.

Father Altier also said in his homily (in partial paraphrase) “Remember, our faith is not in priests, it is not in bishops or cardinals, or even the Pope. Our faith is in Jesus Christ, period. And we need to keep our focus on Jesus. He is the one who founded the Church. He is the one who promised the jaws of hell would not prevail against her. So, this is a time of trial for the Church, and the Church is going to appear to be at times on the brink of [destruction]. The Church is Jesus Christ and look at what happened to Jesus. His apostles had to make a decision: were they going to remain faithful all the way up to Calvary [and beyond] or were they going to run away?”

You and I now have to make that same decision; are we going to remain faithful or are we going to run away? I for one choose Christ, and I pray that you do too.