

21st Sunday per Annum - B
Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b;
Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32;
John 6:60-69
Little Flower - 8/26/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Almost all of us are aware of the recent accusations against retired Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the national attention drawn to Roncalli High School over the guidance counselor placed on leave because of her civil marriage to a woman, and the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report about the sexual abuse of minors in six dioceses in Pennsylvania and how it was handled by Church leaders. This comes in a year when our country has been rocked by accusations of sexual abuse in Hollywood and the conviction of Dr. Larry Nasser for abusing over 100 gymnasts.

I have to be honest. Although I know that I have to say something, I do not know what to say to you. When things happen in the Catholic Church, parishioners often think that priests have some inside knowledge that they do not have. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Like you, I only know what I have read or heard.

The Archbishop has issued a statement concerning the issues at Roncalli High School. I encourage you to read it. Some will agree with him; others will disagree with him. As you probably know, this issue is as yet not resolved.

I find it both incredible and at the same time appalling that former Cardinal McCarrick was able to sexually abuse minors and abuse his power over priests and seminarians for years and yet be promoted to bishop, archbishop, and cardinal. I find it both incredible and at the same time appalling that priests were abusing minors and bishops were covering up the abuse and continuing to allow them to function as priests. Therefore, I feel profound sadness and anger. I presume your feelings are similar to mine.

In response, this past Monday Pope Francis wrote a letter to the People of God. He began by quoting Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this beautiful passage describing the Church as the Body of Christ, St. Paul writes, "*If one member suffers, all suffer together with it...*" [12:26]. We all know that this is true.

Our thoughts and prayers and concern should go out first to those who were abused. Only those who themselves have been abused can understand their pain. However, I believe their pain is probably more profound than the pain of some other victims because the perpetrators were priests, representatives of Christ and the Church, a Christ whom we believe loves all people superabundantly and a Church called to make the love of Christ real, visible, and present in the lives of people today. Likewise, our thoughts and prayers and concern go out to their families and the important people in their lives who have also been affected by what has happened.

Although they are our first concerns, all of us have been affected by these evils. I am sure that many Catholics, especially younger Catholics but also including priests, have had their faith shaken. I am sure that many Catholics feel that they have been betrayed and can no longer trust the Church, its leaders, or its ministers. Because of this, the Church has lost its moral credibility, which has complicated the issues involved at Roncalli High School. I am sure that young men studying to be priests or thinking about becoming priests are questioning their vocation. I am

sure that many non-Catholics and non-Christians who are considering joining the Catholic Church are reconsidering.

Although some might say that the percentage of priests who abuse is not larger than that of the larger population, there is no defense for the indefensible. Although some might say that most of these crimes took place many years ago, there is no defense for the indefensible. Although some might say that since the time of these abuses much has been done nationally and in our own archdiocese to provide a safe environment for our children, there is no defense for the indefensible.

Where do we go from here? We all have to work through our feelings. We have to pray for healing for the victims and their families. Jesus himself taught the power of prayer. In his letter, Pope Francis called for prayer and fasting. We have to work for and support changes in the Church that will prevent something like this from ever happening again. If the Church is going to change for the better, it needs good, holy, committed Catholics, like you, who witness Christ's love in the world and challenge the Church as an institution to always do the right thing.

My brothers and sisters, our children and young people need to be respected, cherished, loved, and protected both in the Church and in society. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" [10:14].

As each of us struggles with all that has been revealed in the Church these last few weeks, we would do well to remember the final words in today's Gospel:

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."