

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Sept. 1, 2018

I am grateful for the opportunity to join with you today for celebration of Holy Mass. I usually visit parishes on the weekend – often when it's *not* a special occasion but rather a normal weekend Mass.

That affords me an opportunity to share in the ordinary life of a parish and also to meet and visit with you, the parishioners, after Mass.

But this is no ordinary time. The Church, and we, the members of the Church, find ourselves in a time of upheaval. In the wake of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, the McCarrick scandal and more, many of your fellow Catholics have told me how bewildered and angry they are.

These are among the emotions you share and they are emotions that are in my heart as well.

The unspeakable crimes against the young perpetrated by many clerics, including those who have risen to the Church's highest ranks, coupled with the failure of some bishops to respond to allegations of abuse with candor and thoroughness – all this has created a crisis of trust.

Understandably, people wonder if they can trust the Church and its leaders.

I stand before you as one of those very imperfect leaders.

People are also asking for action, and action now. You are asking, as are many other people in both church and society, what will be done, what will be different, and what is in place to prevent such terrible things from happening again.

Such a cry for action is understandable as is the frustration many feel that an across-the-board action plan has not yet been devised and those who have broken trust

have not yet been fully removed.

One disappointed parishioner put it this way: “We are moving at ‘the speed of Church!’”

And even though it will take time for the bishops of the United States and the Vatican to get to the bottom of troubling questions and to agree on a plan of action, just like you, I want to get it done and done quickly.

Whatever else happens, the laity will need to be more involved in the Church’s life, both in its pastoral life and in its administration.

There is need for a greater measure of independent lay review to be put in place to exact accountability and transparency, especially on the part of bishops, and to ensure that the Church’s efforts to protect children and young people are sound.

So with humility, I ask both for your forgiveness and patience.

Efforts at the Local Level

In the meantime, I pledge to continue working closely with both major seminaries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to ensure that our seminarians, who are carefully screened, are formed to be good, faithful, and generous priests.

I vow to continue cooperating fully and transparently with all levels of law enforcement in the State of Maryland, to continue reaching out to victims of abuse, offering assistance whether or not it is mandated by State Law.

I also pledge to continually update the list of offending priests that was first posted on our website beginning in 2002, and to continue taking direction from our Independent Lay Review Board so as to strengthen Archdiocesan policies and practices to protect young people and to root out from our midst any representative of the Church, cleric or lay, who may pose a threat to the innocent and vulnerable.

In this connection, I want to express my thanks to you, the leadership and parishioners here at St. Mark.

Your pastoral team has vigorously implemented mandated policies and procedures

to keep young people safe, including criminal background checks, fingerprinting, and training for clergy, staff, and those volunteers that work with children and young people.

You adhere faithfully to the policy of immediately reporting not only any *overt* behavior that endangers the innocent and vulnerable but also the *telltale warning signs* that current training helps us to recognize.

Thanks to your help any and all criminal behavior is quickly reported to law enforcement and every allegation is reviewed not only by the Archdiocese but also by the Independent Lay Review Board which, in my service to you, has the last word on these matters.

What makes all this succeed, however, is not myself or those who work with me. It is you, and your parish and your leadership that enable these efforts to succeed in drastically reducing the incidents of abuse, beginning as early as the mid-1980s and continuing to the present moment.

For your cooperation and leadership, I thank you.

That said, we have a long, long way to go. I've dealt with this painful and ugly specter of abuse for a quarter-century. If I've learned anything, it's that no one, myself included, does this perfectly.

I've learned that no policy, procedure or outreach undoes the pain of those who have fallen victim to those who should have been giving them a shepherd's care.

Going forward, it is not merely a matter of adopting best practices or working harder. What is most needed is deep repentance, beginning with us, your bishops. What is needed is a purification of the whole Church.

The Call to Purification

Jesus himself calls us to this purification in today's Gospel. Encountering the hostility of the Pharisees, Jesus condemns religious formalism, that is to say, religion that looks good on the outside but is not good on the inside.

For example, one can appear quite pious while taking part in Mass but in fact have a heart that is closed to the Lord and the message of the Gospel. But there is another kind of formalism that concerns us most this morning. It's the foolish and even sinful efforts of church leaders, especially bishops, to create a public image of health and holiness in the Church so as to mask sickness, moral failure and evil within the Church's life. In the end, that is what generates so much outrage.

So Jesus tells us to cleanse not only the outside of the cup but the inside. Here is a Gospel that *I* must take to heart for the Church's mission will suffer drastically unless the interior of the Church is continually cleansed of evil and unless the interior of my heart and yours is continually cleansed of evil. I invite you to join me in taking this Gospel to heart. For amid the tears, anger, and bewilderment, many people, many of you, recognize that the Lord has not abandoned his Church but rather is calling each of us to an interior purification from our sins and is calling the Church, the Body of Christ, of which we are all members, to repentance, cleansing, and renewal.

In any event, this is the first stage of evangelization worthy the name. It is the path to missionary discipleship, to authenticity in sharing the Gospel with others.

Friday, September 7th, is First Friday, a day devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the only Heart that is perfectly holy, perfectly loving, perfectly merciful.

His is the only Heart to whom we can fully confide our doubts, anger and frustration, the Heart in which the victims of abuse ultimately find healing, the Heart of Jesus who speaks to our hearts as no other can.

In the Heart of Jesus we find the living springs of salvation by which we are cleansed of our sins, purified inwardly and outwardly, and where we find the grace and strength to come together in fulfilling the Lord's command to repent, to believe and to share the Gospel.

I invite you, if at all possible to take part in Mass this coming Friday, September 7th, and to observe it as a day of fasting and prayer for the Church's purification.

Please pray for those who have been harmed by clergy and other ministers of the

Church, and please also pray for me as I do for you.

May the Lord bless you and keep you always in his love.